

Five selections from: *Tin Whistle, Brass Drum*.

In a Few Short Hours

In a few short hours the earth turns ten thousand miles;
Seeds are sown, flowers bloom and crops ripen;
Lovers meet, their hearts beating one hundred, hundred times.

For a few short hours children play in the sun and rain;
Puddles are jumped, trees climbed, bikes ridden.
Then sides are chosen; stones are thrown.

In a few short seconds the world is cinder.

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Breakfast From Scratch

I.

The toaster jams, burns the bread.
I think of granddad making toast
on the stove top — hand-sliced fresh-baked
wheat, balanced on a bent wire grid.

When it charred, he scraped the slices;
(two world wars taught starvation).

A master carpenter, shaving
rock-hard butter with the tip of a table knife.
Working the pat into soft submission
on the edge of a blue china plate.

Skillfully applying a glaze of gold
onto carbonized bread.

II.

As a child I watch in horror: you unfold
the thinnest blade of a pocket knife.
With a distant eye and well-practiced fingers,
you tease from the thumb of your right hand

another tiny splinter of old shrapnel—
a souvenir you grin.

Obediently, you joined the regiment at twelve,
and eight years later sailed away to fight:
the Turks at Gallipoli, the Germans at Passchendaele;
(where half a million died over yards of land).

An officer, you lead with a tin whistle and pistol—
Over the top.

If I wait with you in that trench,
and you sound the whistle,
and I refuse to move—
will you point the pistol at me?

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Passchendaele

In shade of lesser trees, the reverent
curious amble numbered paths.
They puzzle over place names, struggle to re-fold
souvenir maps—but under the indifferent grass,
how do worms navigate?

The valley hints at chardonnay,
reserves vintage in corked-oak casks.
Full bodied, with good legs, it washed down
hard bread and soft-bellied brie—rind slit,
core stuck to Krupp steel.

The hills smell of vinegar,
shredded heads of cabbage in cloth wrapped jars—
(buried in the back garden, left to ferment)—
and black sausage, pink centers squeezing
from burnt crackle-skin.
Are there ghosts?

If they died near enough to whole,
so many were blown into showers.
Pounded, crushed, scattered—
—nothing left to cradle.
There is a corporal often found

in a shallow crater once filled
with foul green water. He waits face
down, dead from some terrible
thirst, his stomach swollen,
as if he'd been drinking there for days.

*Several lines in the last two stanzas
are quotes re-written from the diaries
of anonymous French soldiers*

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Gardner's Photographs

(a found poem)*

The living jostle down the thoroughfare,
caring little for the dead dripping bodies,
laid fresh along the pavement; the dead
of the battle-field who come to us so rarely,
even in dreams.

We hear list in the morning news, dismiss
its' recollection. A mass of names, strangers;
we forget the horrible significance amid the jumble
of noise. Each name, spoken with a clip, represents
a mangled corpse.

We recognize war as a reality, but a remote one.
There is nothing very terrible in the list, though
our sensations might be different if newspapers
left the names on the battle-field and brought
bodies into our kitchen.

*This poem is re-written after a review of an exhibition of photographs taken by **Alexander Gardner**. The review was published by the New York Times on October 20th, 1862. The exhibition and review were both titled: *Brady's Photograph's; Pictures of the Dead at Antietam*.

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But Not The Falling

This doesn't look good he repeated to his wife,
just before the call dropped.

Fuel vaporizes. Steel sears. Smashed windows
desperately jam beyond capacity.

Sons and daughters trade futures for ten seconds
cradled in clear, cool sky.

Free falling into grace, they press like petals
into grey cement.

This one looks good the editor said to his staff.
The world printed a full page moment.

Readers raged. *Show us valiant rescues:
dirty-masked firemen, dust-coated police.*

*Show us flags waving atop rubble.
Show us flowers piled for the fallen;*

but not the falling.

A poem written after the publication of a photograph taken
by Associated Press photographer **Richard Drew**, and published
by the New York Times on September 12, 2001.