

Dying To Say It

The decision was made—
we went in and killed her—
a squad of father, sister, uncle, aunt,
doctor, nurse, chaplain, myself,
and the finger of God.

We went in and killed mom—
all of us, none of us, stole
the tubes from her dark veins,
slipped off the switches of life,
slid in the syringe of peace, but

We all heard—
the metronomic clicking stop,
saw the green mountains pass by,
shrinking on the screen like troops
marching down sloping holes.

We all heard—
the sighing respirator stop
and waited and watched
in the silence,
the deceiving silence.

She breathed alone—alone—
she breathed alone—
she breathed—

“...cannot compare to the suffering
of the present—with the glory to be,”
verses the chaplain glued appropriately
an anthology—

she—

We came before her throne
with rites of passage.
“Nita”—her brother whispered German in her ear.
“Nita”—her sister whispered, unclear.

The pendulum slowed like the sunset—
small waves of golden white
so faint, delicate, and slight,
seeped back into darkness,
the deep hole of creation
where something hovered
like breath and light.

He was wounded early and deep,
a boy's feelings fired to ashes,
who never trapped fireflies,
watched eagles and sunsets,
got crazy and laughed till he cried,
never made birds of clay,
never on a tender bet—

my father,
always in the next room,
who hid between sheets of anger,
dropped his first tears before her,
like blood and lead. He said
his words, falling like stars,

“Goodbye—
we had good lives together.”

Winter's Edges

When the edges of winter appear, and
 the cardinals haven't sung since early August,
When the jays speak every second day, and
 the trees lose weight, training for the test,
When the geese, calmed down, caw less, and
 the freeways are quiet after midnight,

When will the next funeral be, and
 whose will it be, and
Where will they be, the dead,
 unburied until the spring thaw,
Their bodies lying in cinder block
 waiting rooms?

You said you wanted to die
 that first winter we were married.
You said so much, so many things,
 now buried in ground too frozen to break.
The memories lie waiting in
 the stone house of many rooms,
Not heard since some forgotten August
 until now at winter's edges, but
No spring thaw will ever come.

When I hear the wind again, at night,
 blowing from brick-lined streets
Trying to enter and sleep with me,
 sounding like prairie photos of North Dakota
Where you and I were young,
 so young, too young,
Speaking only every second day, at times,
 and the veins stood out on our necks,

And the winds blew hard, and loud
 as blizzard-lost cattle,
And the windows rattled, and the geese
 had gone to more pleasant places,

I know the only weight we lost
 was our minds.

God Next Time

And will I ever see more of God except in the sunrise and the storm?
Ever see more than the beauty of the flowers and fields, or
a beautiful child in a grocery cart staring back at me,
ever see more than a quiet sea on an early morning beach,
or stunned still trees in the forest, or the swoosh of water on my boat's bow?

What is the face of God other than these, than the love of my wife,
the love of my friends, a happy dog, the yellow bird in my feeder,
the solitude of silence, the greens of Ireland's springs,
the shades, hues, and tints. Did the primitives experience more?

And would I recognize him if I saw him, or her—this God they talk about?
Would s/he be Jesus again, or a woman this time? Next time
God might choose a female to show the world for sure
that compassion is the way--softness, gentleness, composure, calm,
the receptiveness of the vagina, the yielding of spread thighs,
the Mary-ness of surrender, the warmth of the womb,
the mother's hovering spread wings.

And what if the second coming really were a woman coming down
out of the clouds, a glorious lovely woman of light?
And who would our heroes be then, the next time around
in the new creation, and who would we be
if we followed her?

Alejandro

After the drunk tourists
are done drinking in Mexico,
going past my window at 5:00 AM
waking me when the darkness
is still holding fast,

I quit arguing with myself
about whether or not
I have to piss,
get up and do it, then
to the kitchen for a liquid replacement
and a look outside the window.

Red and blue flashing policia trucks
drive by slowly, and
in their eerie stabbing strobing lights
I see him—
I've seen him twice this week
in the dawn—

Alejandro—

the groundskeeper, sweeping
the parking lot
the sidewalks, even the street
with a broom, a pan
and a wheeled garbage can,

sweeping with fervent thrusting strokes,
like a forest-fire fighter
like a lumber jack splitting logs,
like a man beating down a concrete wall
with a sledge,
or a soldier pushing back
bacterial armies.

I wonder, standing by the window,
I ask questions,
I compare the contrasts in this world
between Alejandro and others
who hours later would drive
in gadgeted computerized vehicles
to their rare-wood desks,
soft swiveled chairs with high backs
and lumbar supports,

to platters of glazed donuts,
lattes, bonuses,
profits, pensions, soft palms,
and clean manicured fingernails.

I go back to bed—
thinking, I can't sleep.
I get up and look up
three Spanish words,
and memorize them. Exiting
to the outer freshly-washed
and scrubbed hallway,
his bicycle locked to the wall,

I see him in the courtyard,
sweeping the grounds again!
bean pods, twigs, and seeds,
flower petals, and leaves,
all of the falling
Mexican winter fecundity.

“Buenos dias, señor Alejandro.”
“Buenos dias, señor.”
“Como estas?”
“Bien, gracias, y tu?”
“Bien, muy bien.”

Then with language skills
of a two year old,
I begin my memorized speech
as I wave my arm across the yard
like Crazy Horse defining
his lands and his people,

“Siempre”— (always)
“Todo”—(everything)
“Limpio”—(clean)
“Muchas gracias.”

Alejandro proudly beams
so wide
that I see the gold in his teeth.

“Si,” he says.

War

I was in Melvin's garage
towards the end of his life
when he told me.
I don't know why
but I felt honored.

Melvin is one of those
no bullshit guys
who always tells it
the way he sees it.
He doesn't believe
in lots of words,
and certainly not
embellishments.

He is the world's best
and smartest mechanic,
better than any doctor,
not a body, or organ
or limb, or vein
he couldn't fix.

He gave me hell
if I waited too long
to service my truck.
"That's a carbureted engine,
not fuel injected,
gas can get into your oil
and pretty soon your cylinders
get etched, then you get problems.
Gotta change that oil more often,
'specially in winter.
Don't wait so damn long
next time."

I always paid Melvin with a check
made out to cash
at his request, and would say,
"Here's some tax-free income."
We both would smile,
knowing he was a "screw 'em" guy
when it came to income taxes,
and how the government used his dollars
to kill people.

One day when I paid,
this is what he said.
“I was in the war, you know,
in the Pacific theater.”

“Yes. Weren’t damn near all you guys
in town there?” I always threw in some
cuss words--guy talk, you know.

“Yup, me and Don enlisted together
and fought together, it was hell,
I tell ya. No fun. Seen it all.
Arms hanging on tree branches,
brains stuck on bark, eyeballs,
chunks of skull with hair,
hands, legs, feet, ears, cocks,
strewn all over the place.
Hell, even on my weapon,
and my hands,
and face,
in my mouth,
on my uniform,
in my helmet--

just wipe it off,
spit it out
and keep on shooting.
What the hell can you do?
It’s either you,
or them
gonna die.
I did what I had to do,
ya got no choice.

Killing ain't easy,
you know.”

“Don’t tell me about war.
I’ve been there.
It isn’t right, I tell ya, goddamnit,
no matter what those bastards say,
all a bunch of damn liars
if you ask me.
Someday they’re gonna pay,
someday they’ll get theirs.”

It was the most
I ever heard him say,
and I couldn't get it
out of my head
Sunday morning
when I was in the pulpit
and Melvin was sitting
behind the pews
in his usher's chair,
looking out the window
while I was preaching
lofty concepts about love.

When he came up front,
the last to receive the host,
we looked at each other,
deep,
and I said,
"Melvin, this is the body
of Christ,
given for you."

A holy mystery was happening,
because killing
isn't easy,
you know.

Someday.
Someday.