

*A Short History of the War of Rebellion*

That abandoned cabin off the Appalachian trail,  
ragged West Virginian oak forest, far out  
redoubt for your last stand,

July, two o'clock, in the stilled, cicada heat.  
At fourteen, you are Meade, so we get to be Lee and company,  
steeling ourselves for a last frontal assault.

There you crouch under the pane-less window, holed up  
with your bag full of acorns  
carefully gathered for days before,  
waiting, waiting  
trigger finger squeezing one,  
as your younger brothers and I weakly  
return your sure fire, from our lesser store.

So hard flung, how those acorn nubs stung!  
One good hit -- pricking the skin to bleed  
enough to call it quits.  
Once you got it in the eye,  
ambushed on the Crestline trail,  
then having to burn the afternoon getting out to urgent care,  
you were fine, but so bitter at your brother,  
as if he had aimed to kill--  
we took to wearing goggles  
you stole from the school's lab room.

Our family was founded on civil war,  
though Dad was always out of it,  
aping the battles, drilling to enfilade,  
jumping split rails of chevaux de frise,  
staying always in the line of fire.

No one ever let anybody win.

Always three against one,  
no one was on your side.  
I pled your much younger brothers needed a strong ally,

but I was lying,  
a part of me wanted to beat you.

This time your brothers finally decoy.  
while I storm your bunker, snatching  
your hefty ammo bag, running for the laurel hills.

Victory! Victory! We're whooping it up now,  
while you curse us,  
and we curse you back for being a sore loser.  
Until you took your life eight years later,  
I don't think you ever once surrendered.

## *Jackknife*

While I was helping your younger brother with his homework,  
you ran into the study  
with a story about how a truck driver lay  
hemorrhaging, still conscious, thrown from the cab,  
his semi jackknifed on Rte 684,  
how you always stopped to talk with him  
on the Shop Rite loading dock,  
whenever he made the weekly beer delivery,  
a decent man, kind, who died en route to the hospital,  
leaving a wife, two small kids in Scranton.  
Weeping, you slid down the wall,  
a funeral to attend,  
a visitation coming this Thursday, Harris Funeral Home, from 4-8,  
flowers, a new shirt, a condolence card.  
Your brother sent marching,  
dinner delayed,  
How to brace you up, still so raw  
from the last hospital 3-day stay?

After an hour, you smiled,  
so pleased.  
There was no accident.  
No decent, kind man.  
No jackknife.

## *Earth Backwards*

Sometime later I learned how hard  
Violetta (fellow morning group member)

slammed her hand against the wall,  
screaming delight at the victory kill,

a little of the lounge blotched with bee smush,  
fuzz stuck to her waving palm.

Not wanting to interrupt,  
“Pt politely walked out,  
from group, saying nothing”

(your usual answer to DBT, the new talking cure).

Yet another migratory wrong in Bumbledom,  
misguided from the milkweed to the ward.

and somebody else got her a tissue.

Always such a good boy, the facilitator added, “Pt bothered by his peer’s behavior. . . was excused;  
otherwise Pt maintains perfect attendance”

Questioned later, you emphasized the high respect  
you held for wildlife,  
(withholding that the rest of us, including yourself, could go to hell).

That was pure family pride; we’d have all done the Buddhist same.

But the smocked ones scribbled,

“Pt has profound disgust with people. . . seeks affinity for animals, large and small . . . must  
process event with facilitator. . . Components of antisocial and narcissism,”

as I found through FOIA, months later,

buried in your thick, thick file, “Progress Reports”

small torn page of stinger humanity

against all the diagnoses, pill refills,

and weekly reality testing:

“Can Pt can spell ‘earth’ backwards? Easily. Checked Sane.”

*Here Come the Easters*

We met them, Barb and John, at the Grief Retreat,  
a month after we lost our son.

Theirs shot himself at home  
following family prayers.

John rose to say how hard  
he embraced God's gift,

seizing opportunity from suffering,  
as he cradled his son's smithereened head.

Barb said nothing, smiled down.

We were awed,  
Raw, welling, faithless.

They gave us up  
for Lent,

then invited themselves over for Easter,  
So we called them that, behind their back.

Just in the door, they insist we go to Mass,  
though I told them that's behind us.

After Mass, at dinner, tongue bit tight  
to the corner of her mouth,

Barb concentrated on carving the butter stick  
into a kneeling lamb, her specialty.

How she beamingly bent the blade for ears, soft as sage,  
knife curling up the cream for fleece

then forked it all over,  
the tines scrawling hooves, little tucked up legs.

All so sweetly mauled,  
we couldn't bear to touch it,

as soon as they left,  
chucked it into the garbage.

### *Impromptu*

Listening to your brother Warren play  
another Chopin etude, *Aeolian Harp*  
and, dear God, there you are,  
in jeans, bold plaid shirt, at ease  
beside him on the bench,  
mild-mannered, encouraging him,  
(once so jealous he got the lessons,  
you'd show us all, YouTube teaching yourself *Für Elise*)  
I stammer, "but you're, you're----"  
unable to get that lead word said.  
You reply, *It's all right, Mom. I can stay.*  
*Dinner, and even the weekend,*  
leaving me so stupidly pleased, I can wake,  
and stay pleased