

THE GUNSHOT WOUNDS ARE ARBITRARILY LABELED

after John Cage

The autopsy report rests like the cherry bir**th**mark
between my eyes t**H**at Dad jokes
“The doctor smack**E**d you too hard,” but he wasn’t there,

or like the neck or**G**ans removed
en bloc with BJ’s tong**U**e—
after evidence of an**N** oral gastric tube
terminated in his empty s**T**omach
after t**H**e coroner noted
no foam in the nares or **O**ral cavity
after placing t**H**e bloodbare brain on a scale

noting it weighed 1350 grams w**I**th an unremarkable
p**O**ns, medulla, and cerebellum
(except for the deformed bu**L**let fragments
of brai**N**)—
the section**E**d tongue
s**H**owed no trauma.

The last time I saw him **A**live
he yelled in a d**R**unken rage
through a bathroom door I lock**E**d myself behind.

The next morning, we h**A**d pancakes
across a table where we might’ve said two wo**R**ds
ending our visit with a lazy hug to **B**ury the lashing
and as **I** stood beside him
in t**H**e viewing room, I couldn’t remember his voice.
Then, Dad joked quietly “He’s getting his last hai**R**cut,”
when the mortici**A**n clipped curls around his face—
after he’d already been d**R**ained
after the halo of GSW¹ **A** entered w**I**thout an exit path
after his **L**eft upper back was tagged GSWs **C**, **B**
and the body cavities were sewn in the standard **Y**-shape

(omitting the “specia**L** senses” dissection
because his eyes and e**A**rs remained intact)—
I still hope it’s him **B**ehind every locked door
instead of confusing the thund**E**r
for his **L**augh
or imagining his kindred b**E**rry birthmark
on my tongue when I bleed**D**.

1 abbreviation for gunshot wound

TO THE SLOW BURN

what part of *he's dead* don't I understand
despite holding four boxes of his smile
in a city that returns to its everydayness
over and over and over, the reaping repeats itself
as sirens echo like hunting crows
under a dangerous sun, we can't slow the clouds

blanketing bodies before a body burns
by time or by fire or both without cause
and who's left lies about surviving
because we don't know if the moment
the bullet catches *dura mater* in a brain
is when the soul escapes a body or

when it can no longer listen to the crying
come back home big brother, please, come—
can't the ocean swallow "God's plan"
and eddy grief instead of haunting
a home where vaulted ceilings
make more space for ghosts?—

then rain comes and an honest rage
rests after learning *he was unarmed*
but brother is still dead
while the murderous officer continues to work and breathe
and breathe, and breathe, and breathe, and breathe
in Inglewood with a holster of smoke

but I see brother's body in my dreams
with alive eyes like in aged photographs
playing on the gravel of a playplace
when everything we wanted wasn't a thing
but a who with arms to hug back
as we laughed our *I love you's* on a yellow bench.

HELP

I'm unremarkable
in my recent hair
loss. I have
dates on my
calendar for
crying. I do this
between my
7-4. *Hell?*
Help, I'm
angrier than
I seem. I'm a
bullet in a temple.
Please tell
my mother
I'm tired of
forgiving. Her
denial of loss
is gruesome like
a grieving
mother. At
the mortuary,
a stranger
hugged me like
a mother. *Please,*
no, I hugged her
back. Is it easier
to daughter
from afar?
I fight relapse
then kiss
a purple unicorn
urn. One photo
shows a family
before the
lacerated mess.
Brother, please
show a sign
you're still here.
My memories are
losing blood.