

# Into the Cyclorama

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# A RAG FOR MY FATHER

*leisurely, not too fast*

I say a man must see  
his father's face at least  
one time before he

learns to be the kind of man  
who doesn't know what  
man he wants to be.

ϕ

A father is a kind of trap  
you could easily fall for.  
A father is a type of map  
you stupidly search for.

A man sets out to walk the barren desert of his father.  
Finding nothing but the sand he says, *This land is cursed, my  
father never lived here.*

A girl sets out to clear away the clutter of her father.  
*On everything I own, she wails, but if I pitch his things my  
attic would be bare.*

A father is a kind of trap  
you easily fell for.

ϕ

What should we say? What can we write about  
the men who are our fathers?

After the dinner plate that barely  
missed my head,  
after the epithets, the sketch he ripped (pastels  
of the moonlit ocean)—

he would offer me a can of Coke,  
pour it black and sizzling over ice cubes.  
He would drink,

I would drink,  
and so we downed our Lethe.

*What does it mean to be the daughter of  
a man who doesn't know his father?*

He could tell  
I hadn't thought like this before, the way  
my face drooped, I crossed my legs.  
The sun sets so late this time of year. As if  
it still hasn't learned how to walk away.

♠

Forgive me Father for I have sinned I wished for  
a different father

Forgive me Father for I have failed to wash away  
my father's sins

## CONFESSIONS OF THE SNOW

I was the sky  
crumbling thick and fast

as a leper's skin,

I was the good disciple  
who made up the story, the photographer  
who fucked his model,

static on the radio.

What I conceal might hurt you.

So the night I let you watch me  
paper everything, blot the streetlights, blur  
the rooftops, fences, concrete—

nothing sharp anymore,  
the world for one night complete—

call it my gift to you.

I am the pile  
of shit no one wants to step in—  
commuters, tourists, blind man tapping his  
tennis-balled cane on the pavement—

I am the water  
spreading like a stain.

## CYCLORAMA

“We report one gunman  
26 dead, mostly children.”  
(Reuters Twitter feed)

To view the cyclorama, you must enter  
the silo built for a single painting,  
step inside—you step inside the painting—

gawk, swivel,  
spin your head, climb up and down  
the scaffolding, walk. You piece the story  
as you walk. Memory,  
that withholding stranger, doesn’t give us much—

half a horse, a bayonet,  
dribbles of pink sunset in the corner,  
a bare arm dragging through the grass—  
so we stretch the canvas. Fill. Crop.

I admit I watched the interview—  
she was beautiful. Six years old?  
Describing gunfire pops & the screams...  
articulate, composed.

Hanging from the ceiling,  
a canopy of clean white cloth  
to blur the canvas edge.

Paul Philippoteaux, lead artist:  
“Where the actual material things begin and where  
imitative art commences must be so well done that  
the deception must be invisible.”  
*(New York Times, 1882)*

I read the timeline on CNN—

*Worst School Violence in American History*  
*September 15, 1959: Convict Paul Orgeron explodes a suitcase*  
*of dynamite on a school playground, killing himself, two adults*  
*and three children.*

An ad for Mont Blank—

FIND THE PERFECT GIFT

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

FREE SHIPPING UPGRADE!

Here's a young Confederate soldier  
nearly our height, thrown from his horse,  
looking straight at us. So close

we see the whites of his eyes  
rolling back like pinballs, the O  
of his lips mid-scream—  
Elmer Fudd without his gun, trying to mime  
a message like *Retreat! Retreat!* or  
*We shall not perish from this earth—*

his flabby, painted skin  
balloon-pink.

“Grown men wept.”

Brig. Gen. Henry J. Hunt, former  
Union artillery chief, 1884:  
“I never before had an idea that the eye  
could be so deceived by paint and canvas.”

Days after: I notice every door,  
cabinet, window. Every post  
on Facebook. Do we  
have a lockdown procedure?

Someone is playing Barber's  
*Adagio for Strings*. If you  
don't think it's time for gun control  
you're dead to me! Someone launches  
a 501(c)(3). Then another.

Ruins they piled  
before the canvas base—

stones plucked from battered fences;

whole tree limbs, shaved;  
a cannon (field-retired); torn broadcloth uniforms  
dangling original brass buttons;  
wet Gettysburg soil.

Buckled, ripped,  
rolled up like carpet after a stint in Boston,  
the painting toured in Newark, Brooklyn,  
Baltimore, Washington;  
sometimes in fragments, sometimes whole.

Rain. Wind. Two fires.

*CLICK TO PLAY.*

I click.

Pine trees in the parking lot  
quickly looped for Christmas;  
single-file on the pavement  
long white daisies. At each head  
they've laid a bright stuffed animal:  
bears, dogs, a big yellow duck.

—Clumsy, categorical,  
and like all makeshift memorials  
made from things because we are.

And here I am crying  
because I want to cry, I am at home here,  
doing what my body wants to do—  
flapping, shaking, leaking—

I'm the white balloon  
bobbing slowly to the ground,  
dirty, hungry, beautiful.

Night at the cyclorama.

Then love poured into  
the restoration.

Five years' work  
replacing the sky, all fifteen feet  
from floor to ceiling.  
Then stitching, swabbing,

archivists brushing  
faint swords in the cannon smoke.

What's the point, we might ask, why  
stitch this history of violence  
so minutely?

I guess I mean the kind of love  
that is attention mainly—  
the way a cat claws  
her mouse until the stuffing bleeds,

free of blame or hope  
and therefore  
capable of anything.



## AUBADE, STILL

—Awake. The slap  
of wet bamboo on windowpane.

It's that dream again where  
all my teeth fall out, bones  
spit into my palm like  
wet crushed corn.

The machine of me  
quivers. Think of Liszt

counting gondola strokes,  
brooding over death, trying to  
transcribe it. Maybe that's

the best we can do—  
anatomically correct,  
soul-challenged. Cue

my neighbor's chained-up dog,  
men popping off fireworks.  
All the registers of being

someplace at this moment  
here, beneath this sky  
which isn't black exactly—

swirly-eyed, like cream in coffee,  
myself at twenty—

but rose, silly rose.

Two knees shining in the dark:  
Still me. All accounted for,  
unbelievably solid.