

("Now in the Cold Dawn...")

Now in the cold dawn I see close, clear
the night
ripped by terror.
Exploded sudden and bright and harsh with terror
and stabbing, nagging, empty, numbing
pain tears at my gut and tears at my eyes
which are open to the morning
to see in the cold light the blood on my skin.
Dried and scratching at my skin, stinking
gut shivering, nauseating stink
of your blood, my blood, burst
warm and sticky and stinking from your screaming body.
Crashing, crushing bullet
and lung-shattered blood gurgling scream
and running, running with the bullet
stumbling, running
run away from pain, away from the terror in your face at the window
run to help, run to peace
run to terror.
Run so far we couldn't find you.

No, I only got as far as the door
where a body had fallen.
Where your body had staggered blind into the wall
and had fallen, blinded, tripped, had fallen
into a darkness and calm
a calm that envelopes me as I try to pick you up
and you are heavy.
Oh, so heavy, I can only just cradle your head in my arms
splashed and wet with blood
dried now in the morning,
and blotting this stranger's bed where I sit and do not sleep.
Just watch,
listen to the drizzle, drip of the dying storm
calm and empty I see the grey shapes of this dawn.

Hear my sister's breathing near me,
she, lightning-struck, slumped, crushed
sleeps now.
Sleep, try to sleep, they said
rest away the night.
Will she, with whom I share a mother, share a father,
after this night,
sleep away the pain to wake
and hear among those voices in the next room
your voice?

I did.

But like me she'll smell the blood, remember
the pool, shiny on the floor
the room where I held you and tried
so hard to hold the life,
to stop the holes, to put it all back in
push back blood
blood bleeding life
fading
around us the night swelling, storm screaming death.
Death grasping, gouged life
grabbed smashed life
to leave us a cold
eye-fluttering, mouth-stiffening farewell.

"He's dead."

I remember I said that.
I remember when I phoned my mother,
the policeman watching me,
"daddy's been shot,
he's dead" I told her.
She knew,
but I told her anyway.
I remember I said that to the policeman
who would not say anything

they just brought their cameras and radios and vans and dogs
striking the houses with light
and hard voices and searching and pulling and picking and pushing
to find, to see, to know.

But they can't see with the dark glasses they wear
can't know with their crippled heads
can't find with their noseless dogs.

For the man with the gun walks free away
soft across the wet grass
between the policemen who smiled
and turned to cover you with their blanket.

"He's dead" I said
but they said nothing.

We knew, we held one another
as they took our father's body
out, I don't know where
a cold drawer in their tall building perhaps,
I don't care.

You are dead.

And how the scratching of this dried blood scratches deep in myself
and the drops on the window are the rain coursing down on my face
cold and hopeless, for I am numbed
paralysed,
helpless.

Like the people talking behind the door,
and our mother
who will be here on the next plane
and the people who will come to the house
silent together, stunned, grieving
alone,
as I am now with my sister's sleeping,
the two of us alone with this night.

So, empty, I watch the dawn
feel the cold light touch my skin.
And I see that we wear the scars of fighters.
Sudden, clearly I know
the sun must rise to light our pain
for we are not alone in our hurting, our incomprehension
we are not alone in our anger
we are bound, we burn together with strength
with our wild fury
and so I, scarred with my father's blood,
I know what I must fight.

Jann Turner