

APACHE ROADKILL

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As Solon moved to strengthen the Greek city state by portraying casualties of war as heroes, the existing practice of mourning the dead—words broken into sounds by the cries of many women—was banned, and funerals hidden from sight. The law stipulated that there were to be no laments outside the home, and specified the degree of kinship necessary for a woman to legally accompany a corpse to its grave before dawn. The sound of collective wailing evoked fears of wild animals on the move, and of an uncontrollable revenge undermining the best interests of the state. With the linking of laments to property rights, any concept of “family” beyond economic ties was outlawed, and the history of war’s consequences for all families could neither be seen nor heard.

—Tina Darragh, "NO RIGHTS OBSERVED"

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In 1969 all the children were killers and we weren't one of them eating paper, Kimmy and where were you I did not then and do not now know how to talk my father BULTACO and I remember the dirt flying that dirt track the way the pebbles felt flying up and hit you the smell slightly metal diesel some strong fuel mix which makes motorcycles go and I know or think we must've crawled skinny wrists and chubby while our fathers watched us I don't know where the women went but we would have been small enough to listen under trees and crawl just shy of the image

Walter Cronkite's firm resolve his talking blanket over babble as we you were always kind and soft as babies what did we when the news came on black and white VHF UHF television on wire carts what did we think or could we tell arterial flow And all the pictures our now president has written out of law "embedded" as they never were arterial flow a nation where did all those folk songs go a dream perhaps not often not tangible lapsing into smoke our daddies your dad Joe I always like him soft gentle a laughing voice before the marriage fell to pills and salesmanship's truck coffins

I don't know how we were not of a generation // war // it was spinning out around us I remember being sent to the basement always children's place bulletfull and Army // we'd dress up the camo flaks –thick enough to cover // down by the river the boys played Army wore the clothes thick enough you could hit BB gun what did we know of war we knew to go below when he came drunk I guess crazy the schizophrenia emerged bull-like from his head Viet Cong Viet Cong I don't know where he was stationed and admit to still can't find the voice to ask a question

my father
he was his friend
one to talk to
cos no one else
but we the children sent below and so the way to piece this would have been AFTER
overhear listen in all the sly skills of women little girls
listen in listen up
would have been how we
knew he's crazy
Viet Nam and Viet Nam and
Viet Nam
cos what Joe told him
And now—today—I walk this campus where I sometimes teach—I walk a ghost—no one
knows it is me—this is how it is
"Miss Sprague! Where you at?" Sam a student last year once called me
but today today Viet Nam
I hear the language in the city of Westminster the students talk—a tonal
And do they walk ghosts too of something left and I thought of you and Viet Nam Viet Nam
they told us later we ate paper newspaper what did we know babies eat those words
to mush a wet kind of gut maché and did it stick in my craw celiac duodenum I don't
know now how we care not

"I'm afraid not!" "I'm afraid not!" what's edit out of news cos these days when it's only
facts (no picture embed—that—no coffin no flag) and when a cheap trick Law & Order
sends me to tears last night manipulated into grief and Viet Nam Viet Nam
Mister—do you really think the kids were not affected?

And I don't know how this second story goes but
narrative construction –and anyway under Nixon time All time oh anyway I'm not
attached to getting it quite right so the way I've synthesized the tale goes like this—
Denny was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam or no that's not right he flew these cargo planes
some kind of special ones but I don't know the name and to this day he and his wife Pat—

at every holiday gathering—they fly them still a group of vets all the guys in Vietnam in
Vietnam they flew these planes too

and there is something there

yes we know

the history forgetting the thing inside post civil war the vets they said could never talk
about it and then that time in Utica Bosnian resettlement the kids there always watching
clocks Ramadan and no gum even and here we were bearing down Iraq and Muslim and
the white kids refugees their dads were dead and the four year old in mom's class
screams "Zatvaraj vrata! Zatvaraj vrata!" every day for weeks what she remembered
war war war

"Close the door!"

and a story somewhere the little girl and the grandma gathered chestnuts
someone got shot was left for—but which one—and the other left with her apron full
but I don't know or want to talk about the women how many times a day of rape
but every day when I come home the door the dog and if she's there then no one after
inside to get me

So, Mister, the thing indeed is our political moment bear down this generation too hard
like birth which you wouldn't know and Jonathan asked me to explain one time
there were no words I couldn't tell and how come—labor. it's hard. lapse to that then
silence.

So the thing My Appalachia how it was "the kids are alright" we never were or only just
alongside the edge of every thing and outside we blew the bullet up squeezed it in the
vise til pop! white lights it was a secret we'd been blowing golf balls found somewhere
and found the bullet top blew I couldn't see for a long time just white light and the fear
that had they heard the sound? the grown ups at that party, you weren't there then Kimmy
and I was older too but the fear to have of telling—Jane's gone blind we put a bullet in
and didn't know but somehow miracle of children my sight came back and we just kept
the whole thing secret//

Earlier, tho, and how to tell this too, my dad, he went to college—1st time—1st gen—I
teach them now I wish I could reach across that wounded—well, he dropped out, they
often do went home, met my
mother

so now I'm here
but before before

Viet Nam

the wheels of state were rolling

and he lived with a sugar king! this was in Florida—close to Cuba—I don't know how to
include more sort of drunk when he told me and from so much silence and turn away I
never know what might come or when to listen—but I should have taken notes, I know
—so some big company Domino? the heir to that the sugar kid—he was his roommate

my father

the whole world

later, up that same coast, Newport, a rented cottage

so much faking class this was and is important to my mother's sisters and she the little
one goes along, knows better. there was some guy running drugs—this would have been
under Reagan—he had a yacht or chartered one, right, for the guy who owned it—the
hull was loaded some seventies code name—heroin? cocaine? some druggy powder—
what you make sense of at the edge of those boys so fucked by joblessness and come
back warped and wounded and how to reinsert yourself into the everyone who only wants
to look the other way from who you are and what you come from. I feel this still and
never know how to tell but why I write you and I write you I am thinking him and
wishing language just enough to cover and not opaque and yet all that broken space no
way to fix and so I too don't bother looking but the turn away is not a choice
the things you carry
weighty

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