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**From ELECTIVE CARNAGE**

[Iraq: 20 March 2003 to 9 April 2003]

I

It's not seditious to want  
a life without inspection,  
interrogation, and demands  
for definition.

"If you don't have something to hide"  
why worry about  
spies in your soup,  
your hair, your bum?  
Secrecy, come on,  
you know this,  
"it's none of your business."  
Being forced to describe  
a privacy  
in public terms  
when no terms at all will do,  
being forced to endure  
your innocent life  
describe by the law,  
means getting caught  
for nothing at all, defiled  
by fill-in-the-blank suspicions.

#### IV.

Sanity peels up,  
laminates unglue,  
seams spread, warping  
cracks the seals, and sometimes  
clean socks  
are the final  
refuge; sometimes  
it's two,  
clean,  
perfect lines of verse,  
as hard to come by  
as peace, as catching  
Fat Man falling  
before he explodes.

#### V

Rivets are popping  
out of the missiles,  
the subs, the drones,  
the battle tanks;  
soldiers are frying up beetles,  
sipping antifreeze  
to stop the pain,  
dogs and cats  
have been decoding  
secret orders all along,  
sniffing out  
their demonic  
randomness  
and getting everything  
adorably wrong.  
But the missiles  
falling apart in mid flight  
now that's something  
even the snails  
are applauding  
in their silent,  
charmed,  
vulnerable joy.

## VI

Could it be we've triggered  
the whole, horrible  
booby trap dream again,  
another cycle of Hell's  
ingenuity, another run  
of the butcher girls  
crooning death songs,  
prepping to skin  
the whole world alive?  
What a tune,  
that high pitched sizzle  
of death's little angels  
in grimy dresses  
and blood caked stares  
—we can hear them  
cawing  
their baby lisp laughter,  
torch songs from the last  
slaughter, now  
settling for another,  
like an orphan might think  
a buzz saw is its mother.

## VIII

Some people won't  
sink in fear, refusing  
to drown  
in vats of adrenaline fire.  
Some people  
tip the vats over,  
and gingerly  
walk away,  
gingerly,  
gingerly  
walk away  
into another  
way of seeing.  
They don't  
give horror its due.  
They see it as just  
one more grain  
on the most  
beautiful beach  
under Aphrodite's  
smooth, cool feet.

IX

Geese and cranes are going north,  
elms are infant green,  
just enough rain  
so the mustard glows all over the ground.  
This is here.  
It's the same war everywhere.  
Over there, Rachel Corrie  
was crushed to death  
by a bulldozer and its driver  
who ran over her and then  
backed over her again,  
turning her bones  
into jagged wet dice  
in the bruised bag of her body.  
This morning, I am at peace  
in my office under the reading lamp  
in a warm robe,  
and Rachel Corrie,  
who thought peace was right,  
is 23 for eternity,  
a girl with a spine  
and no skeleton to speak of.

XIII

Masks are massing on the frontier.  
You can't tell what they're thinking.  
Are minds behind them?  
Do minds wear masks  
to ambush the gullible?  
Does your mind wear a mask  
it can't tell from itself?  
Are you always surprised by the sniper  
who puts out a pot of tea and tries  
delicately to kill you  
while you drink it?  
Who are those masks?  
Why is shit  
running out of their eyes?

XIV

Sleepless again,  
trees uprooting themselves,  
flowers wilting on purpose,  
snails heating up in the sun  
to boil with accusative  
self-immolation.  
It's just as we thought.  
Nothing can stand  
what has come to be.  
We are at the beginning  
of the end  
of the dream  
we've loved more  
than we've feared  
its horribly short life.  
The cats refuse  
to wash themselves,  
or sharpen their claws  
on the elms. Even  
the lizards taunt them,  
hoping against hope  
they'll be eaten.

XVI

Helpless faces  
mobbing for food and water,  
hating us who kill them,  
feed them, torture them,  
liberate and rend them,  
rebuild them, cosmetically  
enhance them, smack them  
with Coke  
and Winstons,  
and scratch and sniff ads  
on blow-ins  
in piles of Golf  
Digests and Vogues,  
shrink wraps in tact.  
And who are we?  
Are we them  
by a tear  
in the toilet paper walls of luck?  
Are we waiting our turn,  
not them  
for now,  
but always, forever them,  
waiting,  
disguised  
in fate's  
fatal,  
tear-away attire?

XXI

Broken,  
unfixable,  
gone,  
as absent as if  
nothing believed it:  
conscience,  
peace,  
virgin liberty.  
Once the flaw  
is revealed,  
it takes over;  
it becomes  
the perfection to be lost,  
the perfect crime  
admired,  
the perfect corruption  
to be swabbed out  
and saluted.

XXII

Eyes glued shut,  
hands locked in bags,  
mouth duct taped tight,  
nose blocked,  
feet held  
in bungee cords  
and plastic garbage bags,  
urethra  
pinched to the bursting,  
anal sphincter  
plugged deep, and the  
life or death command  
to “speak, defend yourself,  
defend your view of things,  
defend your spirit....So,  
you won’t mount a defense?  
Nothing to say for yourself?  
Pile him up with the others.”