

COLLATERAL MURDER - an epiphany (for Ethan McCord)

I tried to forget,

But you see my eyes filmed it all;

Every bit,

And I'm locked into this perpetual viewing -

Camera;

Soundtrack;

And the Stench

Coming new upon the scene I felt the dismemberment seeping my fatigues in the extreme heat

strewn like trash worried and torn by dogs it was hard to believe these were bodies of men
the pavement seemed to cry to me to lie down in empathy yield and be received
fragmented with its unburied dead respect almost brought me to my knees

but in the heaving of that decaying suburban street I imagined I heard
in the far away land of the living a small child and there was a van at the edge
of that 'engagement' and from it now trickled a thin wailing a siren reeling me
into its source and two children (I am the father of two children) were intimate participants
there in the day's business small bodies thrown by the enemy they couldn't see
into the violent dismissal of their father limbs binding them together
as if to forever identify them in loss

and picking them apart I took the girl into my arms and I found my own life lying there
her blood ran into mine and I was taking glass from her eyes the enemy insurgent
who was four the Apache's prey with the spilling belly so that she could use them to cry
then running through confusion I was back to her brother whose life now flickered every
yearning I'd been schooled to forget and against despair I was

opening up all my longings into this child I was holding from death calling for a response
invoking urgency hoping even now to find the right reaction
command had none of it wounded children? a distraction, Soldier!
Of no consequence in this adrenal theatre

But they did for me

centre stage they took the limelight with repeated encores ripping the tortured applause
from the flesh and blood of my soul scene stealers who unnerved
every taught response shattered training destroyed discipline called out
the roar of a deeper language than the one I had learned to repeat a torrent
bursting its banks and plunging me into the baptism of its resistless current

And that day you see stripped the uniform of all but the stain of their blood
it lay there right there over my heart holding firm against all takers
an indelible rebranding

and the torrent ran red with soldier

and they will speak to me those children to the end of my days
and I will go on listening
to bear witness

to all they have to say

Because before,
On that old dry ground
In another land

I was every fool's face

And here
Beneath the waters of grief
I have found the grace
Of understanding