

No Room for Human Error

May 2020

a white spacecraft is launched

a man is pinned to the ground

this mission is a test

this is not a test

this is a historic first

this won't be the last

observers record the launch

bystanders record the arrest

the spacecraft leaves the atmosphere

the man struggles to breathe

the spacecraft loses gravity

the man loses consciousness

the astronauts reach the space station

paramedics reach the scene

the astronauts board the station

the paramedics load the man

the spacecraft is shuttled back to Earth

the man is shuttled to the hospital

the mission is a pronounced a success

the man is pronounced dead

Dirigibles

In high school, I was a nobody,
but was big, a blimp.
And the bullies teased me
for my size, called me
“GOODYEAR” in the halls

I tried to rise above them,
but they still dragged
me down. My hope sank

Then I met you

Like me, you were big,
—a Zeppelin, in fact—
but you loved yourself,
your body no less

To my surprise,
you even loved mine,
taught me to do the same

And like dirigibles,
we lifted off,
rose above the crowd

As we got higher,
they grew smaller

Steered by chubby cupids,
we sailed to places
nobody could find us

Though neither as sleek
nor as swift as jets,
we glided nonetheless—
graceful crafts
carried by heat

Bright,
buoyant,
lighter than air

Madre

You conceived me on _____, _____, in the Peruvian city of _____. Your name was _____; my father's, _____. You two met on _____, _____ in the city of _____. You were from _____; he, from _____. He was _____ years old; you, _____. You had _____ eyes; he, _____ eyes. You were _____ feet and _____ inches tall; he, _____ feet, _____ inches. I looked more like _____ than _____. Had you not left me at the hospital, you would've been _____. My name would have been _____. We would have been _____, sometimes _____, but mostly _____. Oh, what a _____, _____ family!

Amoral Panic

a new virus spreads

we are not immune

outbreaks of illness

they're the carriers

fear of foreign bodies

they'll infect us all

possible exposure

avoid contact at all costs

risk of contamination

they brought this with them

more cases confirmed

let's inoculate ourselves

masses quarantined

we are now immune

patient zero identified

it can't be one of us

a vaccine is developed

continue to take precaution

the virus is contained

we've cleansed ourselves of them

Caveman

In my blood, mind, you dwell, Neanderthal.
40,000 years couldn't keep us apart. Or the genes

that increased my risk. Do you miss the ibex,
bison, mammoths, aurochs? The chase, the hunt?

The power that comes with a stone-tipped spear?
When launched from an atlatl, it's deadlier.

With them, would you have survived? Instead,
you faced my ancestors' arrows ill-equipped,

no match for their volleys of javelins, darts with tips
dipped in poison. Instead, you're often depicted

with clubs that could crush skulls, bodies that could
only point, grunt. *It's no wonder you went extinct,*

they say. By my own hand, though, I almost did,
as well. A cave can be mental, its darkness fatal.

Boys

Before there were girls, there was He-Man,
the X-Men, you, us. You always had

the bigger collection; I, more imagination:
Let's use your mom's yarn; let's string

a zipline so our guys can fly! The best part
of sleepover: pretend-play in your bathtub.

Pew-pew! Pew-pew! You can't get me,
Skeletor! Soapsuds made the best defense.

Pew-pew! Pew-pew! Hit me if you can,
Magneto! By the time your mom called us,

our hair was dry, our fingers prunes,
the water cool. *Ten more minutes, please!*

We'd get five. Then time for bed. *PJs,*
now! You'd take Wolverine; I, He-Man.

Nothing's better than a power sword!
Nuh-uh, claws are so much cooler!

The sheets pulled over us, you'd hug
to yourself your gloved, masked mutant;

me, my helmeted, breastplated spaceman.
Lights off, misters! In nightlight,

though, we'd whisper still, doing our best
to fool your mom, trying to keep one

another awake, too. Our heads atop
your X-Men pillows, our bodies beneath

your matching comforter, we'd fall asleep,
warm and peaceful, in one another's arms.

Massacre of the Innocents

May 24, 2022

and yet again there's another
this time in Uvalde

and yet again you offer *thoughts and prayers*

yet again do you blame
the lack of God in the schools, homes

but even in the Holy Land, there was still a slaughter:

Herod's legions
armed with shields, javelins

villages encircled
doors kicked in, trampled

crowds dense, loud in yells, screams
wooden plates raised
tips of iron pointed

the smallest speared
no one spared

the Baby Jesus faraway,
safe from harm

did he grow up with survivor's guilt?

Oh, those children of God!

Phineas Gage

At 25, you lost a chunk of brain.
At 25, mine changed irrevocably.

You weren't the same since.
I haven't been, either.

I'm still luckier than you,
nicer than the man you became.
But sometimes irritable, too.
What excuse do I have?

Iron never punched through my skull,
carved out a slice of frontal lobe.
I didn't vomit
up brain and blood.
The public never called me
a miracle.
Would I have liked that, anyway?

At circuses and carnivals,
you posed with the tamping rod
from your accident,
as though it were an artifact,
all to profit from your injury.

I sometimes call into work,
ask to take a mental health day,
when I know I can go in.

We do what we need to survive.

Custodians of Our Democracy

Who cleaned The Capitol of the mess the mob left behind:
bagged spent spray cans and empty water bottles, glasses
cases and cigarette butts, hauled them to the dumpsters?

Who swept the littered floors of the Rotunda and Statuary,
Crypt and Speaker's Office, collected into dustpans the
splinters of broken benches, shards of smashed windows?

Who scrubbed down the marble surfaces, wiped the scuff
marks of shoes from the patterned tile floors, removed
the smears of blood and feces from the sandstone walls?

Who draped plastic film over Madison and Adams, traces
of chemicals present on their portraits. Or wrapped up
Zachary Taylor, too, his nose and lips stained with blood?

Who rechecked the chambers and offices, locked up, then
cleared out for the night, the secular sanctuary back safe
in their care, yet indelibly stained by a disorderly horde?

Green!

Green, green, green, green! Green, you must've seen green: green jungles, canopies, foliage, green mangroves, vines, moss, green leaves, grass, insects. Green, you must've been green: green camos, tigerstripe, jackets, green coats, boots, pants, green belt loops, shoulders, collars, green pockets, stitches, buttons. Green, you must've been green: green sleeves, epaulets, gloves, green helmets, rucksacks, boonie hats, green bands, straps, brims, green skin, faces, greasepaint. Green, you must've seen green: green tents, buddies, bodies, Green Berets, canteens, grenades, green Hueys, cockpits, tail booms, green masts, shafts, skids. Green, you must've seen green: green engines, blades, rotors, green fuselage, empennage, wings, green propellers, pylons, pistons, green C-123s. Then Orange and Orange and Orange. And Orange and Orange and Orange.