

HISTORY, NOTICE ME

History! I learned about you in class!
I love your stories!
The adventure, the conflict, the discoveries.
I like to imagine what decisions I might have made in another time or place.
Where did your stories come from?
Who told you?
When did they tell you?
How did they decide what to share?
Is there more?

History, can you see me?
I was the one staring at the clouds and watching the tulips open.
Did you see me waiting patiently for things to reveal themselves?
Did you see me? I wasn't afraid of change.
I know that stuff won't catch your attention,
but was it because I didn't express my gratitude well enough?
Or is it because I did not demand gratitude enough?

I never expected your attention, History.
I was the one dancing the cakewalk, charming the Authors
who then threw tomatoes at me when I got too many ideas.
No, I never expected your attention
Although, I hoped you would have told me more about my grandparents.
About how their sweat fell
or how it felt to be yanked away from your only sister,
to be looked at suspiciously.
Lonely and stuck.
Yearning and invisible.

Thank you for taking good care of my son.
His grave is marked, clean and decorated.
His photograph is sharp, his blue eyes confident.
But History, do you know why I ran away from home?
I was 16 years old,
I wanted to learn to read.
Even though I never saw it in the news,
I know I wasn't the only one.

History, you catalogued the violence around me.
The weapons are well labeled,
the boundaries clearly mapped.
But your graphs and timelines miss what holds it together
before, during and after the destruction.

The mellow labor of teachers,
and the tender touch of my grandma's hands after dinner.

History you are so new here,
we were here moons before you.
But I, too, am new here.
They were here long before both us,
surviving and thriving.
Communicating without oration,
leaving and returning without fear,
taking and always giving back.
Does it hurt to know they will be here after you?

I am your sweetheart,
you look at me with warmth and belonging.
You can be quite kind and earnest.
I gave you everything you wanted:
a leader, a uniter, a martyr, a victor.
I was a poor boy who came to power, an American classic.
Volumes are printed about my decisions
in court, in debate and in war.
If others may join me in your vaulted halls,
those who were never allowed to make decisions,
I will share these titles proudly:
honest, hard-working,
confused, grief stricken,
hopeful.

History, I do not care if I make it in your books,
I created my own stories.
I brought people along with me
and I went with them.

History, what are you trying to tell us?
Are there any new truths?
What is it like to not be able to look into the eyes of your neighbors?
To be hardened to the wails of joy and woe?
What is it like to overlook the pulse and the rhythm of a body?

Perhaps you are not so unlike me, after all.
Leaving so much untold
trusting people will see their way.

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