

## Elegy for Bobby Kennedy

1

Who invited you into our trailer-size ranch  
but that nobody, anybody, put-on of a nanny, TV.  
So I knew all about the press cameras'  
pop-and-flash surrounding you like celebrity lightening  
and your microphone voice talking up America.  
White House helicopters lifting you to some secret service,  
your older brother, the president, handed you that role  
the way mine passed me a mustard and cold cut sandwich.  
No one watching us, we could kick  
and punch, until our stomachs flushed up.  
Our secret was Clorox the floor, that lingering,  
sour yellow, cheap meat smell, before our mother's  
headlights hit the windows, her patience  
as fried as fast food she bussed at a shoo-fly diner.  
No minimum wage for waitresses, tips the rule  
when you were U.S. Attorney General.

*Forgive the envy,  
I had no idea  
you'd usher in the prayers  
at St. Patrick's Cathedral,  
let alone a train's 220-mile,  
mute eulogy.*

So I hated your Hollywood, Paul Newman's cool blue eyes,  
the left-side parted, preppy-hippie, long brown hair,  
and the nose luck broke so you weren't so pretty.  
How you made the evening news, sometimes, for a family touch  
football game in the autumn park of your Cape Cod estate,  
or luffing on a yacht on a money-green sea.  
My father was a sailor, WWII, sunk and shipped state-side  
to work at ditching sand and rain through a long line of trenches:  
our water frontage, boat and touch.

*Forgive the envy,  
maybe, if I could've foreseen  
the station tunnel*

*opening to telescope  
the first stitches of track,  
the covey of nuns  
in their black-and-white habits,  
at their black-and-white habits,  
sorting the seeds of rosaries*

Then your brother handed you a task  
heavier than an oak-and-brass casket, his assassination.  
How to gather the bone-  
fragments and clean the pink brain-stains  
over Texas bluebonnet sky, November 22, 1963.  
How to speak to a PTSD nation, re-  
playing the stutter of twenty-six frames  
shot with the shaky light of an amateur's camera.  
How to hold a black umbrella  
for his widow, Jackie, our grief's Madonna,  
by a flame knotted above the stone with your last name.

*Who could've foreseen  
the uniform steps  
of four, white-gloved marines,  
the eye-shuttered steps  
of six, grey horses,  
pulling the wagon's  
slow clock of spokes,  
hushed mass  
of people on sidewalks,  
stopped by the awful traffic  
of one coffin.*

And when the navy blue blazers you wore  
like the world was your Harvard yard  
weren't dark enough to suit you

and the luffing yachts and hawking helicopters  
only landed you back to the same hard fact

and the parks and schools, hospitals and avenues  
named after Jack only spelled his absence

you should've come to our house.  
You should've met my older brother.

I could've showed how they had you on TV,  
between Jack's statues, stone ghosts,  
and an assassin fixing the flame on your grave.  
I could've showed you this fist, a one-handed prayer,  
trying to grasp what was and wasn't there.

*and the women  
masked by kerchiefs,  
and the men  
masked by cameras,  
along the stitches of tracks*

2

Scaling the cemetery fence some nights to be with him, was that true?  
Biographers like to make their own statues.  
I watched the screen for what you did and didn't do.  
You didn't hide behind your church's gold-leaf  
( and maybe you should have )  
hand's-off-this-world belief.  
You didn't game away in Cape Cod and give in  
( and maybe you should have )  
to the tug of your wife and, count them, eleven children.  
You didn't buy out like your brother's wife and retreat  
( and who could blame her or you )  
to your own Greek island and private nude beach.

But you did go looking for what ?, whom?, in Third World Chile  
and Peru, took the press' eyes on anything-Kennedy  
down the mines, those shafts and black holes  
of capitalism, to televise the wages of dust  
tailings in the lungs of indigenous workers.  
Was that despair, or hope's dope, you had nothing but  
praise for the rebel doctor and his guns, Che Guevara?  
You did the lecture in Cape Town, South Africa.  
Was that rage, or hope's dope, you asking  
the blonde crowd, what if god is black?  
Did 14,000 feet up a mountain in Canada named for your brother  
to leave a copy of his inauguration speech  
for the rock and the ice and the wind and the light to repeat.  
But did you come far enough, so when you sat  
in that shanty, in the delta, Third World Mississippi,  
on a dirt floor and held that baby  
covered with sores like the mouths of flies,  
did you see some part of Bobby Kennedy?

*a white-haired Afro-American  
waving from where he sat  
on the hood of a rusty Lincoln  
along a stitch of track*

3

I moved toward you as slow as a passenger train stretch-  
ing twenty Pullman cars, 1967, NYC to DC, on June 8th,

*and the Hassidic Jews  
tearing their clothes  
in the custom of their rage*

stalled as loss, again, was the one-armed brakeman, train delayed  
four hours, when, on a near-by track, two were crushed like pennies,  
too deaf from grief to hear the express rushing the other way,

*a family standing on the back  
of a Ford pick-up  
raising Mason jars lidded with lilacs*

I moved like those iron wheels dialed down, so a million in the noon heat  
could believe your bier, car's open side, propped on pall bearing seats,

*a girl, stopping  
her circle of play, holding up  
a pink Hula Hoop*

took me twice as long, after your brother's Dallas, and then MLK,  
Martin Luther King, shot through the right cheek, Memphis balcony,  
the black leader you wire-tapped as Attorney General in the early '60's,

*and the boy scouts in blue  
and the veterans in green fatigues  
giving one-wing salutes*

late as you to admit, without saying, about the man you were wrong.  
This time, before others knew, before facts cooled in their morgue,  
you arranged to speak, empty lot, Indianapolis, stopping your campaign.

A thousand showed, some rocked baby carriages, among mica of broken  
bottles, the sage of trashed bags, you stepped up to no microphone

and gave the news about their King, and there was the quiet riot  
of disbelief, *No. No.* Was that guilt, or more of hope's dope, you quoted  
book-crap about ancient Greeks and pain and wisdom, but then you broke  
through you and got them, how you had a brother slain by a white man.  
Next day, sixty cities burned, that one lit candles and turned up the psalms.

*and the ladies  
reaching with their arms  
over their shoulders,  
sad ladders  
for the pain to climb  
out of their bodies*

4

I want to say, you'd already taken me far enough, like to believe  
I would've voted for you, if I could've at torn blue jeans seventeen,  
when you ran in the primaries, O who wasn't heart-rocked and blown  
away by your street rallies, like later day raves the way you threw  
yourself into crowds, who stole your shoes, cuff links, tore your shirts  
and you love-hated every poll-taking-circus-second-guessing-minute  
didn't you, Mr. Comeback Jack, Mr. Sullen Elvis, Mr. Trust Fund Jesus  
raising the dead in you as you raised the dead in us with that touch,  
in small groups, too, Chicago elderly, tucked into nursing home gowns,  
at fundraisers, Orange county, pandering to Jews, tell me you didn't know  
he was casing security, when you called for funding more Israeli arms  
was putting rounds into a snub-nose 22., the Palestinian, Sirhan Sirhan's

*and the ladies  
reaching with their arms  
over their shoulders,  
sad ladders  
for the pain to climb  
out of their bodies*

Did you have to go that last rally?, so I could say, should've been there  
before the catered food and water and glass-stoppered liquors

ran out and the high heels and dark-polished shoes  
stepped from Union Station with the Navy Band's drums booming

what was hollow and loud inside of everyone,  
before they marched through the lawn's index of stones at Arlington

and up the knoll and down past your brother's grave shaded by flame  
before they stopped, where you cut a name

for yourself in the ground, before I could say, should've been there

*somewhere down  
that iron line  
stitching hope and sorrow*

*my hands  
holding a sign  
like that child's*

*flap of cardboard,  
elegy  
in one, stubborn word:*

*Bobby.*