

Shelter

I need some cover tonight from the dark.
I need some shelter from the wings
who beat my head into memory
where my sister sleeps
in the small upstairs bedroom
among the crucifixes and the dried palm leaves,
among the lavender smell
of our grandmother's
Sunday black silk dress
in her house where we've come as a family
after church,
the brothers of Belgrade
and the wives from across the river
which is called the river of blood.

In the crowded kitchen,
below my sleeping sister
a beautiful dandelion salad
waits like a bouquet
with blood sausage on a plate
and black bread and dark wine
and the aunts and uncles
and the children in their orbits
and the language
rough and thick on my tongue
when I try to say the words
because the air is suddenly wronged.

My grandfather swears too loud.
His brothers only laugh.
The women shush them all, Eat,
Eat, they say across the room
but something's cut too deep this time
and the children are pushed
with grace towards the porch and backyard,

and from behind the tree of drunken plums
I watch my grandfather
wave his pistol in the air
and his brothers reach for it
as in a frieze
and the shot explode
through the low ceiling
through the bedroom floor
where my sister sleeps and lives on.
I need some shelter tonight.
I need the sleeping hands to waken once again.

--Bruce Weigl