

Our Father,

Man.

What is
man?

It is target
aim and brains
along the marble casket

Man is
a cow's tongue
bristling the hairs
on a cow's rib
in a man's field

That is man
in all filial piety

You cannot name
Him
The Top Man
in high dulcet
silver
and
celluloid

A man is
laid bare
where his hands
cannot touch
what they have
created

His own death
and the history
of his father's death
and his before him
and before him
nothing
but death
as far back
as man
himself.

His naked form
marching across
pages of misuttered
fields of pitched battle
against
his naked form.





OUR FATHER,

by Ben Kritikos



I dream him there. Soft and big, immobile. All the years of knowing but not saying, knowing but doing nothing, hanging from his body like wet robes. Emerging from his past like a shipwreck survivor, only to collapse at the first sight of land. Men of a certain age, they can't escape this one important fact: weight does not diminish with time.

You asshole. You should have known better. You had hands
"But my hands were tied." You knew the quickest way out
of a knot. "But the rope was wet." You sat in the sun
for years getting dry. "But the sun made me sleepy."
I found you asleep in the house. Cool and quiet, a chapel
tucked away in the moist heart of your sun-baked memory.
Still and helpless, it dawned on me how futility
spoke through the gestures of your waking motions.

Attacks levelled at your person:

- In a boat with your father, fishing. He lost his patience and threw a fishing knife at you. The blade pierced your buttock. You still have the scar.
- The last time you dated a village girl. She caught you cheating, or so she thought. In a controlled explosion of spite she stubbed out her cigarette in your face. You still have the scar.
- Pandora, our black lab, with buckshot in her left flank. Metal beads healed into flesh like a secret. Pressing her body against me for reassurance, I imagined I could feel it. Who shot her, I asked. You said, "They wanted to shoot me."

If you insist on playing music while we cut through the surf, then I will throw myself overboard. Into the sea. The salty, sweet sea. I will cook like bivalves in tomato sauce. "Add a little seawater to make it sweet," you said. "The saltiness makes the acid taste sweet."



You showed me once how to make avgolemono: separating white from yolk, so much lemon juice, mix one into the other. No, not like that! Oh man, you fucked it. It's fucked. We have to start over. Your disappointment hung naked over the egg shells, a deep yellow reflected on your face. I tried not to laugh as the kitchen got smaller. Your feelings have always been too big for pokey British new builds.

If anyone is bored, he will bore everybody with his mission to rescue us from boredom. Plonking down a huge pile of long-neglected photographs, like a treasure trove of suppressed thoughts, a collected unconscious. This one, my auntie the year she worked in Berlin. She smoked then, bed-headed and thin, wearing a too-tight roll neck. That one, my mother buying cigarettes at the airport. Why? And here, my grandfather--my mother's father--looking happier and healthier than I've ever seen him. In profile, contemplating the shallow blue of a small beach. He's tan and relaxed. A million miles from gas stations and Yonkers Raceway. "Can I have this," I ask.

"No."

I slip it between the pages of my journal when he leaves the room. A stolen memory. After all, it is my grandfather.

My sister called me to say that he was in the hospital. Bad news? Who knows. With him it's always the tragic death that never happens. I cooked dinner for Bea and stopped mid-stir. She held me and I cried. We ate then watched a documentary with Noam Chomsky in it, because the death of the American dream is a subject I can make sense of.

It's not that you were a bad man
but that you took what wasn't yours
never believing anything couldn't belong to you.

Just a man

like all men

of your place and time

You took what wasn't yours

like all men do

Sucking flesh from stone

the moment it ripened

like all men do

unclothing unfeeding

the naked hungry part of yourself

like all men do

advancing on the future

without recourse to the past

like all men do

casting off the austere cotton

of an older generation

you let your favourite self loose

like fish

cast back

wriggling in a winedark womb

and you

in the lurid air

drinking heavily from both directions

a body of such mass

all things are sucked into it

orbits pulled apart

the flesh of the lamb

turning on a spit

going nowhere

and even you

the force

at the centre

are not full

only heavier

like

all

men

