

# ARMIES IN THE BLOOD

PETER COVINO

## NO MOUNTAIN

*If I have a faith that can move mountains...1 Corinthians 13: 2*

1. The day after a family wedding,  
our sister interrogated our father

beneath a lamp.  
She rearranged the furniture

in a makeshift storage room  
in the basement.

She was getting (*blank*).  
His son's (*blank*).

He'll swear to tell  
the truth...the whole.  
We are connected

by wires from ceiling  
to floor. We will not  
permit him to leave.

We'll shut him into walls.

2. Amidst this damage, loving oneself  
is akin to a party on a destroyer,

“change those diseased sheets,  
wash them with lye”—

pain you can taste,  
no one can contain, oilslick.

3. *Saper soffrire*, know how to suffer,  
a book he read us.

Survivor of the Benedictine monks,  
abbey in the shadows of Montecassino

where at age eleven he was apprenticed  
woodworker, against

their isolate pawing. Today  
he rations his wife's medications:

high blood; he feeds her  
expired foods, tinny peas:

sadistic self-mythologizing  
spaghetti western avenger—

of what scarier masochistic self?  
Roach-filled, piss-stinking home.

Impossible to distance oneself from the same  
coursing eruptions: *scatto*:

4. one of those elusive non-translatable  
Italian words—a daughter's rage-full, prolonged outburst,  
impulsive hissy fit—two days after

recounting how he threatened to burn her  
down there, cigarette trick, to demonstrate  
what sex feels like if she did, before she married.  
For fifteen minutes that day, we lost our sister  
in some trendy North End leather-goods shop—

*of course we wouldn't leave especially after realizing*

5. she'd forgotten her cell phone. 95°—  
swooning day of collapsing dogs,

we were hungry—and she emerged  
with an overpriced handbag she didn't need

and little appetite. *His* wanting instead  
to keep his wife fat and unavailable.

To keep her arguing, and bound  
to his wraith-like tirades. What's

the flip side of this coin. Jester? Sergeant?  
Businessman and exploiter?

Something worse, and more humbling, I feel

6. the wave of breath through me. I see  
the underground tunnel of *Cumaean* hell—

we were literally raised in its shadow—  
this is not metaphor or the Sybil's startling

tantrum of transformation. Like that Yiddish joke  
about less ugly people rotting underground.

Friends like bedbugs or maggots,  
first they eat you, then they burrow.

Friends and family like new boots,  
the tighter they are the more they hurt.

# AT THE ANIMAL HOSPITAL

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They called  
my partner  
of more than  
ten years  
by my former  
partner's name.  
I guess  
it's good  
a decade's  
gone by  
without a pet  
emergency  
and only one  
new boyfriend.  
By whose  
standards?  
Tim was not  
amused.  
Austin Powers  
is really  
his dog,  
sexy underdog,  
mini-him.  
Truth be told  
he's been  
paying  
most of the bills.  
Stage-five  
lymphoma.  
Couples therapy.  
The fear  
this chapter  
too will soon  
be over.

## GUARD

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An adrenaline reaction  
allowed him to walk away—  
Mr. Austin got scared  
and wanted to get out of there.  
For a while he ate  
a small bowl of kibble  
after days of hardly being able  
to do anything. Then  
we had to put him down,  
I couldn't stay in the room.  
I acted like I was coming back,  
“Guard the house,” it seemed  
the right thing to say.