

Between Wings

Natalia Treviño

In October 1970, San Juan, Texas made international headlines when pilot Francis B. Alexander smashed a rented single-engine plane into the local shrine. Alexander, considered an authority in teaching migrant children, was the only fatality.

—from *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times Texas* Oct 24, 1970

Your arms stretch under the blue garment.
Not feathered, nor a flowing drape of sky,
nor a holy blanket, or a pressing breath,
your robe knows to keep

stiff, form an erect isosceles pair:
yoked like wings to your hidden neck.
Only your face carved from wood
reveals it is a tiny mother

of God that is the column
supporting the blue wings. The carver
decided a gilt crown for your head,
the shape of earth.

Wrapped twigs round
the globe to show the earth was housed
in holy twist. Left your eyes open—
as if gasping at the weight.

It was a teacher who hired the plane that morning.
Had retired just days before.
Said he would kill the Catholics, the Methodists,
the Mexicans. Crashed the plane

directly between the house
of prayer and the bustling school.
Between children at their noon meal
and supplicants in the sanctuary.

It was a beam between
the two buildings that kept the exploding plane
from killing one person inside.
It was that silent spine between your wings.

Chicago

Carl Sandburg

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen
your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I
have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of
women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at
this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud
to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here
is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a sav-
age pitted against the wilderness,
Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white
teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man
laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost
a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under
his ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-na-
ked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker
of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the
Nation.

For All the Innocent Victims

Naomi Shihab Nye

in reference to the recent CIA interrogation report

