

The Sorrows of Carrie M.

I was a tower of fury and glory.
They called me Carrie.
A postman's daughter.

The wallpaper, nautical.
The carpet, shag.
I woke in the middle of a story
about myself

without a beginning or an end.
It was nap-time, they said . . .

*Oh, the coquelicot is a flower
which does not keep its petals
or promises very well.*

My grandfather had the hand of a seabird,
and with it he clutched
the rail of his bed. *Tell*

your grandmother I still love her, he said. So this is death.

And the boy on the corner: DON'T WALK, the flashing
halo spelled above his head.

But the sky was a blinding cookie sheet on fire.
My mother had such blue eyes!
And my father in his blue shirts, smelling of her iron.

Some evenings over silverware and meat
my parents stared at me:

Carrie, tower
of fury and glory.

I was their only child.

And then my mother died.

The pastel soaps in the soap dish had lied.
There was a teacher poised at a blackboard holding
a piece of yellow chalk.

The teacher was death. The blackboard was the sky.

Oh, my teenage heart a little tear-drenched pillow

 a pin-cushion without pins

 a souvenir from a place
I wished I'd never been . . .

*Oh, the coquelicot is a flower
which doesn't keep its petals
or promises very well.
The soldiers in their bloody boots.
The defoliating breeze.*

This was the nineteen-seventies.
Haunted orange, and a whole
false corpus revolved above the dance floor . . .

"Who cares? Who cares?" the sparrow sang to the storm . . .

I care, I said. My name is *Carrie*. I wrote
a letter to the president asking
him to end the war, and then—

One of those carnival games any child can win. It
had nothing to do with luck. Simply pick a duck—

Got a job at a convenience store.

On the radio, the cynics
sang about love in a chorus. The shadows

of burnt rubber
on a road headed north.
Feebly, those shadows
spoke feebly to me:

Get yourself a man.

So I went out and got one
with muscles and a gun.
Above the house, a black balloon
drifted slowly
toward the sun, and suddenly I wondered—

Where have they gone, those girlhood friends I loved—?

Oh, Margaret of the scarves. Oh, gentle-haired Clarisse.
Impaled somewhere on spearmint leaves?

I e-mail them, but I
don't think they'll e-mail me.

Another summer, and I'm stunned
to find myself attached, still, to one
of the sources of this life, but I don't know which one...

Wisdom, beauty, lust . . . ?

While next door, two teenage boys
speak seriously of amps
and lead guitars. But I know who they are
and what they've done.