

A M Y T U D O R

Mathew B. Brady Shows His Last Photograph

This is the photograph I kept for myself.
I took it, developed it in its silver collodion bath
in secret so that when the horse appeared
on the plate I would be the first to see it, its ash nose
up above the surface of bloody Antietam creek, its white
shaggy sides slicked down, the caisson harness dragging
behind it now that the cannon had been blown away.

But it was not the horse I was looking for.
It was the boy on its back. No more than nine or ten,
a drummer, smart Union uniform, hair mouse-brown
and cropped cap-short on his ruined head. You see,
he had wrapped his hands around the reins' leather straps
most likely there in the water, most likely as the horse
(spooked by the shots, the cannon fire, the shrill shouts)
crashed into that terrible water and swam
to avoid the blaze of musket fire on the banks.

That's where I took this picture—not in the heat
of the fight, no, much later—feeling much the ghoul
there set up on the bank as the freed slaves gathered the dead

into great burlap sacks. The horse was still swimming up against the slow current when I took it, the boy's body still draped across it, caught with the reins in his hands. His thin legs were trailing behind him in the water as though the horse was running and the boy had risen off in some glorious flight from its back.

I stayed in Washington much of the time after that because of what I saw there on the plate:
the horse's eyes black pools surrounded by wild fear's white,
the boy's broken body appearing like a phantom
on the photo's glass. I saw just what this had cost the beast,
and that boy, and me in the dark room's strange light.
So that's when I hid this photograph—and hid myself—
far behind the lines and never went into battle again.

AMY TUDOR holds both a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Humanities and a MFA in Creative Writing. Her first book, *A Book of Birds*, won the Liam Rector First Book Prize for Poetry in 2008 and was published by Briery Creek Press that year. She teaches writing and interdisciplinary studies courses at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky.