

C.N. Bean

Emily, the one who held on

I met Tara years afterwards.
At the end of a class she said
Emily had been her best friend.
They both had loved riding horses.
We connected for a moment.
You know what I mean: Her moment,
my moment, nothing to stand on
but our refusal to let go.

Sid got the call in Roanoke
where he had gone with Emily,
the first of Seung Hui Cho's victims.
Because she barely clung to life
the doctor wanted an R-N
to ride with the ambulance crew.
Fifty-plus mile-per-hour gusts
grounded all the helicopters.

Wind peppered with ice and snow hit
me on that 16th of April,
an hour or so after Cho
made his Virginia Tech debut
in a one-day run of *Macbeth*
to prove art could be objective.
Ryan got to Montgomery
as D-O-A as dead can get.
Emily died in Roanoke,

where Sid got word of a "Code Green,"
the alert for a disaster.

He rushed back to the hospital,
where nurses, doctors and admin
prepared for waves of casualties.
Mike heard rumors of a shooter
who had danced in two victims' blood.
He had been stocking carts since then.

Chaos hit the E-R en masse,
via ambulances non-stop.
Radio traffic turned Babel,
too much confusion all at once.
Emergency responders switched
to an alternate frequency.
Triage moved to the E-R bay
to be closer to the transports.

Victims arrived in states of shock,
not yelling or screaming for help,
or asking for others to call
their closest friends or relatives.
They were locked in survival mode,
a dull sense of stun to preserve
resources in an ultimate
encounter between life and death.

Sid later went to remove dead
bodies from Norris Hall. He saw
two down in the second floor hall.
A janitor had watched them die
and escaped but didn't know why.
The hot warning shot missed his ear.
Shell casings outnumbered victims.
Hollow brass littered floors of blood.

Seung Hui Cho made human hearts his
focus. Not love. Evil hates love.
The heart that pumps the blood in flesh.
That's what he fixed his gun sites on,
the humans on the other side
of barrels with black eyes as cold
as his own the day I saw them.
Emily held on like we did.