Home Movie

In the eyes of the men
in the documentary, the eyes
of the animals
they slaughter. Heavy drapes,
their skins, falling
to the floor.
I was only a child when I looked
at my father and saw a boy, small and bewildered. Asked,
one man finds a few words
to describe the chute—
the narrow passage
in which *there's no room*
to turn around,
away.

What good were my mother's words
meant to soothe— *Your father is a hero. Every day*
he gets out of bed—?
Wasps. I—
wanting to protect my sad father,
and me from his sorrow
which was raw
as if pulled out,
hung on hooks
and displayed—
was bound
by this dilemma
to turn ferocious.

Interviewed about the documentary in which he interviews men

who work in a slaughterhouse, Martin Benchimol writes: *I wanted to discover the place once forbidden to me… to meet the men who work in the slaughterhouse and seem similar to how imagined my father when I was younger.*

Why?—

What haunts him?—

In my own way, I get it.
One man says he does it for his children—
kills— and I remember a few hours before
my water broke
and the real labor began,
I was using a tiny brush to paint white-violet jasmine flowers
when, all at once, I had an uncontrollable, near-violent, need to…
— exploding splatters of red everywhere.

I should have mentioned earlier that it's Elul, a holy month
during which we are asked to bare ourselves
and mend our relationships, most importantly, perhaps,
those of our blood.

Watching the documentary again,
this time with my teen
and her phone—
Are you watching? I prod,
Are you watching?
You should watch. But
why?
What haunts me?
They sense it,
one man says,

the blood in the water
then don't want to go in.

She has had enough. My daughter excuses herself to her room.
It's just my father and me now on the couch, watching
the trapped animals
or so I imagine—the heart in his chest swelling, pressing against the walls
of, taking over, the room—
Are you, he asks,
watching?
Sometimes,
a second man says, *the animals go in*
but then turn around
and stare at you.

It is written in the Torah that during *Elul*, the shofar—
whose call, some believe, announces *Wake up! We are broken! We are whole!*—
should be blown each morning.
What is a shofar
but a ram's horn
emptied of bone?

A third man demonstrates how you do it
with a knife. *You have to make a little cut*,
he says, *where you can get your finger in*
to hook the heart,
then cut it,
and then open it
like this, he says,

like a notebook.

Near the end, the first man wants to be seen,
clean;
to take off his dirty apron.

It's almost impossible to think of my father
without thinking of his woundedness,
of mine. Yet in a home movie—
the only reel we have—
my father is chasing me
with a hose
through columns of light.