

The Charleston Church Massacre

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The reporter with perfect hair and perfect teeth
asked Mrs. Tragedy how she felt
now that her innocent son had been gunned down in church.
How was the family coping? Had he been a good boy?
How had she reacted when she first got word of the carnage?
I watched the news, disgusted by so much pandering to heartache
but I didn't turn the channel.
Something in me whispered in a voice I wanted to believe
that I'd only watched so long because to turn the TV off too soon
might dishonor the victims.

The talk shows were blurbing through each of the dead
so we'd know all about them.
They wanted to turn away from the deranged killer.
He'd opened fire in a church with a gun he'd gotten
even though he'd had a history of mental problems.
Turned out he'd been protected against having to wait too long for his gun.
Every friend and relation of the murdered churchgoers
was asked how they felt. Anyhow,
the killer was a white racist.
They said he was unstable.

He was not the right color for being a thug.

Everyone on TV had something to say about gun laws and race
relations

and mental illness and background checks

but I was afraid nothing would change.

I couldn't stop thinking

about how the prayer group forgave the killer and urged him to atone
because he'd feel better if he did.

I wondered if my past disdain for religion

and the way I'd made fun of what some people believed in
had caricatured my own dog-tired pope.