Kit Pepper

Bach's Dance
(for Glen)

*Each piece remembers us perfectly*—Anne Michaels

Have you ever had a story told to you that in the moment of its telling is too full of something to be questioned or interrupted? And then after, wished you had, wished you had asked a few questions, for a few more details.

It was like this during my last piano lesson, a week before my teacher died: his telling the story of a lone fiddler who stopped sniper fire. From some bombed-out building this fiddler played Bach’s *Bourée in G* and both sides took the guns from their shoulders, their hands from the guns and then, when the fiddler finished, clapped and clapped till the fiddler played again.

In truth, I’m not sure the gunmen really kept clapping or that the fiddler played on and on, but this is how I imagine it, how the story has taken shape in my mind. I didn’t ask my piano teacher who the soldiers were, who it was who played the *Bourée*, how he himself came to know this story when in all these years I’ve not been able to find it in any book, from any other teacher. Instead, we talked about dynamics and touch—
things that release notes from measures of a score,  
squeeze melody in behind rubble, toppled doors.  
That afternoon, working through Bach's Bourée  
my piano teacher and I believed  
music could stop death. An oath  
I still believe, even when, for reasons  
smaller than a grace note, people die.  
When Bach learned his first wife and son  
had died in childbirth he prayed  
that his music not abandon him. The death  
that music stops is a bigger death than  
this or that particular dying. The soldiers in  
my piano teacher’s story, never died,  
instead they put down their guns and listened.