

Poetry by Stephen Mead: Remembering Beirut, Halloween '83; Map Pins; Forced Labor



STOMA / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Remembering Beirut, Halloween '83

The ground beds a stuffed effigy with bulging leaves.
Through peculiar affinity
it resembles some soldier.
Notice the guise of these clothes.
Consider its uniform grubbiness. Be a witness.
Here is frailty.

I lug the dumb body as if carrying my own reflection.
In another land some marine is dragging the dead weight
of his friend from the steepness of a ditch.
Hear the solstice hour toll? It's the season of reaping
soon to be celebrated, full-fledged, on All Saint's.

Jack O' Lanterns gape from their pumpkin infernos.
They tug at my form, a sinewy candle lending motion to dusk.
The moon wears the same face of negligence,
staring directly through, perpetual, obsessive.

Skulking beneath it I haul my likeness on a cross
of dried corn stalks. In the garden a fire rages.
Leaves crackle, russet, auburn, yellow. Witches burnt pure
of skin, the singed autumn embers ascend and I let,
with a gasp, my twin fall to be caught.
In stacked grass, the silhouette burns and smolders.

Let flames state metamorphosis, take change
from the depths, their swaying shadows.
Let them be purged, untouched by harm and rise fertile

from earth to winter the long haul of a death and a grievance.

Tonight something in me was sacrificed but saved by the struggle.

Let it be just an event ritualized for one night
and not a sequence, serpentine, leading to another whole era
of hell.

Map Pins

& photo opportunities—

A world between say, this
President's address & some plane's covert
loading. Operation
Heartbreak. That's
melodrama, effete
emotionalism. Stick with
facts. Contracts. Point A
& Point B, land masses &
bodies of
water, the planetary typography
worn on a polyester shirt. There's

import, exports. There's the dollar
value status, the stock market
resources who happen to be human,
each significant as a billboard
but not all necessarily advertised.
An after-thought that would seem, the
boardroom memo, a game of

telephone,

the press (cover)

reports (up) inside leaks (dodge)

a thousand pricks (question &

answer) of light (the cameras)

fastened by (flash) brass tacks

Forced Labor

The long haul is the term for strain.

To go in, sweatshop ore digger, your colony owned
by a bigger government who, in turn, is at war with a
different one...

Sure, to go in, after the Big A & surrender subsequently:
reality a mirage but for body counts, headaches,
the daughter, photosensitive who can't leave darkened rooms &
dies

anyway, at 39, her siblings, one female born without bones,
& the next, presently 50 but burying his youngest,
such recessive aberrations passed on by their Mom,
a Korean import from Japanese mines...

Sound
familiar?

To put bombs behind us, prejudice, an epidemic,
look at Bikini Island on film:

the natives packed up, the burned homes,
and those natives told, shown diagrams:

"Testing Site. " "You are at war."

Foreign phrases. News to them. The pictures helped
while they smiled, waved at cameras none had ever before seen.
Next in came the Navy, understanding perhaps as little,
leaving 2 goats shorn and placed in metal crates:
no hemp to chew through or bolting when meters hit red.

To many, in tinted goggles, watching, the blast was:

"Magnificent." "A firecracker". "A sunset."

Others thought it "a let down."

Still, all the votes were not yet in—

There were still those sailors swimming through such liquid

marble,
the clean-up crews, the witnesses touching charred Palm,
their uniforms Geiger-clicking & their flesh as well,
having to shower, be re-tested & wash wash again
to get radioactivity off.
The same happened elsewhere, only to town-folk.

This is the humanity within inhumanity, that, in ignorance,
we bombed ourselves, & this is the knowledge:
genetics, marrow-solvent,
a tunnel pushing to upturn the stone fetuses.

In P.S., another news item my fingers squeeze:
a photo, its caption snatched from the TV page.
"Mushroom Cake, Navy Admirals Blandy, left, & Cowery,
assisted by Mrs. Blandy, celebrate first atom bomb test,
1946."

Here's the close-up: two hands, the Blandy's,
joined by a knife slicing frosting, the confection rising,
a cloud of froth as washed out as Mrs. Blandy's hat.