

# New Poetry from Ben Weakley: “Beatitudes I,” Beatitudes II,” “Beatitudes III,” “Beatitudes IV”



THE BROKEN SKIN / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## **Beatitudes I.**

The Lord blessed us with knowledge. Twin curses, good and evil.

Why else plant the luscious tree there, where we were bound to find the fruit? The purple and shivering flesh never lacks in spirit. The ache and growl of our naked bellies are the price

for the moment's delight. So, we gorge and the juice drips

sticky down our chins. Let angels have the eternal heaviness  
of paradise; ours is the moment. The act, willful and with  
intent.

Advised of the penalties. Done poorly. Knowing  
this kingdom cannot last. Looking beyond the gardens  
for a more convincing view of heaven.

## **Beatitudes II.**

Are we not also blessed, we who praise  
the clear night and its silence?

Betrayed by the absence of stars, we mourn  
a billion-years' light no longer burning.

We whimper at the withered grass burning,  
the breathing forest burning, the one  
great and living ocean boiling and burning.

You who created time, who is before all things, who will  
remain after the ruin,  
will you be waiting for us in the cool garden?

Will we lie down with you in the dew-damp grass?  
Will we be comforted?

## **Beatitudes III.**

Are the meek blessed tonight in their bundled and stinking  
shelters  
beneath frozen bridges? Are they blessed with patience in  
their waiting  
for the Lord of compassion? For the Lord that *suffers with*?

They suffer together. Their children will inherit the  
suffering

of generations,  
the split lip of submission, the broken skin of the earth.

#### **Beatitudes IV.**

*Blessed.* From a word that meant *blood*.

Latin for *praise*. Blood and praise to the hungry; they are weak.

Blood and praise for the thirsty. For those who bathe in fetid water.

What are words  
to those who hunger in a gluttonous world?  
To those who thirst beside the brackish rivers,  
choking on garbage? We say, wait for righteousness  
to come from above. But they have starved  
in their flesh so that our spirits could be filled.

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## **New Poetry by Ben Weakley: “In Some Distant Country” and “How Will You Answer”**



STRAW-BLONDE HAIR / *image by Amalie Flynn*

### **In Some Distant Country**

We have seen this before, in books  
and on the screen, like dust plumes rising  
in some distant country. Except,  
some distant country is Michigan –  
armed patriots (terrorists)  
in the marble halls of a statehouse.  
Long guns and body armor.  
Stars and bars on the flags they carry



and nooses for the nervous traitors (lawmakers)  
who can read the signs on the lawn outside –  
*TYRANTS GET THE ROPE.*

Now they are here, inside  
the United States Capitol Building,  
these armed patriots (terrorists)  
smearing their urine and their fecal matter  
on the floor and the walls, roaming  
the halls with zip ties and body armor,  
looking for traitors (lawmakers)  
to bind, to carry outside,  
where the gallows wait.

Their work is not finished.  
Tomorrow, these armed patriots (terrorists)  
will return to their homes, victorious,  
triumphant. They will return  
to towns across the fifty states  
where they work at hospitals and gas stations,  
at schools and police stations. They will smile  
when they greet us in the grocery store  
while they do their shopping.

They will tell us to unite.  
They will tell us to listen  
and be calm, that time  
will grant amnesty (without repentance).  
They want us to forget, but  
their work is not finished.

Who will tell us how to love  
our neighbors now?

Who can show us how to rescue  
our would-be executioners  
from the gallows they built?

**How Will You Answer**

What is the word for *home*  
after houses become bombs  
as they did in Baqubah and Mosul?

One afternoon your wife  
has you drill pilot holes  
to hang a flat screen-tv on the brick wall.  
The mortar dust and shards of clay  
erupt from the spinning bit  
like bone ejected from kneecap  
and skull in the Baghdad torture rooms.

At night, you put your son into bed  
and draw the blankets up  
over his freckled shoulders.  
You stroke his straw-blond hair  
and wonder, what  
is the word for *son*, now?

What can you call your son  
now that you've seen another man's son  
burning?

How will you answer  
when your son calls you *father*  
in the world you turned  
into ash and bone?

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**New Poetry from Ben Weakley:  
“Checkpoint,” “There are 4**

# Ways to Die in an Explosion,” “Good Friday,”



PRAY FOR THE BLAST / *image by Amalie Flynn*

## **Checkpoint**

The car came from nowhere, it came  
from everywhere –

white blur and tire squall,  
a four-door payload  
of heat and pressure and steel.

When it is over, there is just  
the tinkle of falling brass and a man

slumped  
in a pool of broken glass  
and coolant on hot asphalt,  
calm as a corpse.

Doc cuts his shirt.  
His face is weathered by years  
of this. Layers  
of skin and yellow fat pucker  
from his open side.

He breathes.

In the trunk of the rusted-out sedan,  
where the bomb  
should be,

there are only two tanks,  
an oxygen mask, and a box  
filled with apricots and dates.

## **There are Four Ways to Die in an Explosion**

First the blast rips limbs  
from the torso. Throws tender bodies  
against concrete walls. Pulverizes  
bones against pavement. Those closest  
to the bomb are never found  
whole.

Then the fragmentation.  
Little pieces of metal debris,  
like the one that punched  
an acorn-sized hole through the back



of Sergeant Gardner's skull.

Heat from the explosion starts fires.  
Vehicles Burn. Ammunition  
burns. People burn,  
alive. When a driver is trapped inside  
white-hot steel, prayers  
must be said silently for the smoke  
to take him first.

Pressure collapses  
lungs and bowels. The bleeding  
happens on the inside.  
It can be hours  
before the skin turns pale  
and the bulk of a person  
drops.

None of the anatomy is safe,  
so when the time comes, pray for the blast  
or fragmentation. Pray for the heat that vaporizes.  
Pray for the kind of pressure  
that makes the world dark and silent  
before the bitter taste of iron  
and cold panic.

**Good Friday, Udairi Range Complex,  
Kuwait**

The first time I saw the sun  
rise over the desert  
it was 4 a.m.

Across miles of sand

and rusted hulks, the throbbing  
of heavy guns echoed.

Over the horizon,  
where the beginning and the end  
meet and disappear, Friday arrived.

We saw the jeering crowds, the scourge  
and spear-tip, the crown of thorns  
and the crucifix, waiting.

What could we have known about atonement?  
What did we know, then, of judging  
the quick against the dead?