

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.

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?

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?