

New Poetry from Alison Hicks: “I Took A Walk With A Friend” and “Untitled”



AWAY INTO SEA / *image by Amalie Flynn*

I TOOK A WALK WITH A FRIEND

Instead of starting a poem

I told her about my son's first semester
As long as he's home & happy & in one piece, she told me

Worry squeaked out my sneakers onto wet pavement
The rest dissolved with the pitcher of margaritas

Though it was wet & rainy
I did not get a headache

Married for thirty-four years
We selected the movie about divorce

By the time we finally got to watch it
He fell asleep

The book was about a friendship that started in
graduate school

I skipped ahead to the parts where she snorted OxyContin

Didn't want to think about graduate school
But stayed up reading the juicy parts anyway

Personally, I blame the recliner

UNTITLED

The sea is a room without walls. It spills, falling over land.
Land shears away into sea,
rooms echo with spills and falling walls. Walls are powerless
in the war of land and
water, swells uproot trees, sweep cars, shopping carts,
diamond necklaces out to sea,
rooms of plastic ingots drifting down. The sea has room,
gathering spoils from falling lands.

(UNTITLED is included in Hicks' new book *Knowing Is A Branching Trail*, winner of the 2021 Birdy Prize and forthcoming in mid-September from Meadowlark Books.)

New Poetry from G.H. Mosson: “Warrior With Shield”

after Henry Moore



AN X STILL / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Blasted, broken to frag-
ments, left arm won't—
both legs blown &
absent, the spaces abuzz
w/ anger—but I edge
forward, shield up
as leg-stumps toe
for foothold. My mouth
is an X. Still-
ness. Yet I see.
I've been left.

Moonlight empties
onto my chest,
rivulets down
in a branching sheen
& I swell w/ a hunch
I'll make it
as if an old tune
warms the heart,
as if I too
might sing
again to Shelly.

I've been
 some-
 one
else
 once
 some-
body
 other:
 a child.
Dandelion
 pods
 tumble
past my
 open
 palms.

New Poetry from Barbara Tramonte: “Tailored To Fit In”



I WAS GATHERED / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Somebody sewed me with a string

On the bias

I was gathered

And about to pop

This has been a pattern all my life

They hemmed me in with notions

Each stitch bringing me

To a false whole

(I longed to slit my wrist)

I jolted with a shock of recognition

To see that I had drifted to the wrong side

New Poetry from Alita Pirkopf: “Roadkill,” “Sounds of the Past,” “Spring,” and “Unhealthy”



BLOOD IN BUCKETS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

ROADKILL

I bring you blood in buckets,
a heart that I hear, a palsied hand.
It has been eight, ten
years, my issue.
The same as twenty years ago
when your father felt
about me as you do now.
I felt the world shrink
but I thought something,
not necessarily the world,
would end. I had not thought
the world lay flat, as Renaissance
cartographers mapped it.
But now, like an automobile tire
not only flapping, flattening,
parts of it, or me, lie on the shoulder
of my road with dead things and dirt.

SOUNDS OF THE PAST

She thought she had found
soft music and warm dialect,
a sunny sort of near-Italian soul,

But surfaces surprise.
She found out. She found
that underneath pounded
a martial drumbeat
vibrating still

from Vienna's center,
his childhood years
under the Third Reich,
a father fighting
occupying Yugoslavia

with others
missing
the village polkas,
his son.

A burst of marches,
explosions, still resounding.
All of us hearing
pounding steps and hearts.

SPRING

Shreds remain—
unraveled weavings
of brown grasses and mud—
in branches a bird eyed
for her family tree.

The rest, the nest,
that we had watched
through last week's window,
fell.

The dog found
blue broken eggs
in the grass.

Families, all of us
consider seriously.
Upsetting winds
come to nests.
It is spring
and windows
open views
and dooryards fill
with the ambiguity
of lilacs.

UNHEALTHY

I loved my doctors
until one
played sick games,
touching and taunting,
and knowing of rules
I didn't know.
Telling jokes
I didn't understand.
Dismissing me
for my naivete-
stupidity.

The years passed,
and he operated
on me appropriately,
savingsly. Later he
mentioned dining
together or going out
for coffee, but didn't ask,
and got angry for reasons
I didn't know, saying
I hadn't said I'd go.

New Poetry from Jesse Frewerd: "Symphony"



OUR TARGETED HEADS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Ballistic medleys project ambition, while
dancing tones find their pitch. There is
unexpected buoyancy in our youth. March,
advance, train, drill, prepare, disseminate.

It's the 4am ensemble, time to crescendo
awake for guard duty. Report to post, front
gate, alert and ready. Hours, minutes,
seconds, tempo depends on the action.
The symphony begins with an RPG flying
over our targeted heads. Return fire.
Bullets staccato the enemy location.
A cappella commands over the comms.
Write the counterpoint, execute. Threat
neutralized, they retreated. Though my
heart is playing allegro, via adrenaline.
Dynamics decrescendo the scene, bringing
it to normalcy. I return to my life as it is,
my new normal cadence amid syncopated
pop-shots, RPG's, mortar rounds, and IED's.

New Poetry from Hannah Jane Weber: "My Childhood Smelled Like," "Surprise Dawn"



FROSTED WITH MOONLIGHT / *image by Amalie Flynn*

MY CHILDHOOD SMELLED LIKE

cabbage, salted tomatoes, and cracklings.
the flume of dust I awakened when my fingers
untangled the shag carpet's red mane.

crayons I melted against the wood stove,
our terrier's feet, with that same scent of fire.

night crawlers, shad, algae, and lake,
blanketing our boat after a morning of fishing.

Dad's scrapyard, fragrant with hot tar
and smoke from his brown cigarettes,
acres of rust and grease, a twisting maze
leading to one abandoned refrigerator after another,
each filled with jars and jars of ancient rot.

fireworks and muddy gravel roads,
leadplant, elderberries, horsemint.

Grandma's lilac bushes,
reeking of booze from the bar next door,
their purple bunches lighting up the dark
with neon liquor perfume.

SURPRISE DAWN

rows of cedars push through slats of slain brothers
dense boughs gushing berries
frosted with moonlight

my bike light skims twilight from creamy sidewalks
a premature dawn blaring from the flashing bulb
illuminating the wind's fabric
in rustling leaves

I lean far from the sweep of branches
but my jacket catches the emerald froth
and propels me into the flustered chatter of birds awakened
and tossed about by my helmet's pillage of their feathered
hearth

New Poetry from Tyler Vaughn Hayes: “They even pipe it into the bookstore,” “His first time: flight by ropes,” “The edict,” “Rappel annuel”



WAX-LADEN DAY / *image by Amalie Flynn*

They even pipe it into the bookstore

It's never quite silent, though
there's no lowing, not from God
nor his gluttoned blind bovine. Only

the thudding of shuffling ungues
on stereos hemmed, hidden
in the high grass–muzak

piercing through, prodding each
tagged ear. Far better this way—
now they needn't contemplate

the cacophony in BARN 8, the strain
of strings tucked tight to necks, jammed
trumpets jutting through guts, and

the flutes flushed fast with blood.
No, much better this way.
Bow, hark, try not to think.

His first time: flight by ropes

(for Corbin Vaughn)

it's fleeting

the rebuff
of a flutter
fleecing
the sway
in his wee
depleted eyes

exhausted
the college
girls of August
ferry a whole
life on the neck
heaving TVs
sleeping late
they flit
from mom
then return

we can't split
a pendulum
a heavy head
tightened white
like a fading grip
on the tethers
just out of reach

give it up already.

The edict

There is, without question,
a tendency to beg for
those things we have
already.

For instance, I once
commanded God: turn me

into a poet, else I'll pretend to
be a walrus.

Bruggghllff!

Rappel Annuel

I
(for one and once)
intend to celebrate
a soothing din
the cleansing mess
fresh from the wet
wax-laden day.
Hip hip

New Poetry from Andy Conner: “Apples,” “Untouchable,” “Remanded In Custody”



YOU MEAN NOTHING / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Apples

*‘The landmines are just like apples’
Khmer Rouge survivor*

Apples can peel your skin
Like it isn't there

But more often than not
The cruellest fruit
Sucks the rusty blade

And leaves threads

Dripping

Threads of skin

Threads of your life

Dripping

Seeds onto barren ground

You mean nothing to the apples

You mean nothing to the apples

You mean nothing

Their anaesthetic minds

Hold no sense of time

No sense of pain

No sense

No sense of what remains

And if you

Are one of the hand-picked

Who escape in a step-right-on-it flash

Give thanks for this windfall

Which leaves survivors

Green

To the core

As they crawl

With the worms

With the worms

And the decay

Praying

To scrump a handout

With no hands

For the crumb

Which may or may not come

As they sit

In their own shit
Begging
On their stumps
For a friendly worm
To turn
Up
And eat it

Untouchable

On my recent trip
to Gujarat

I took
numerous
pretty photographs

of Modhera
Palitana
Dwarka
The White Desert

and other pretty places

but

the image
I can't delete
from my heart

my hard drive

is of a ragged street child
at Vastrapur Lake
who stepped out
from the promenading crowd

raised
his left
index finger

into the stifling
late afternoon

air

and drew
a rectangle
to take
an imaginary selfie

with me

Remanded In Custody

How can you talk
Of an even split
When you're parents
Of three kids

How can you ask
For understanding
When you won't say
What you did

How can you demand
We keep calm
When all you do
Is shout

And scream
It's your own business
When we're what
The fight's about

How can you plead
You need your freedom
When you've built
Our jail

Whose four sad walls

Have heard it all
Every selfish
Last detail

How can you think
We're stupid
'Cos we don't know
What it means

To move on and
Make a new start
When we're not yet
In our teens

If you two
Are so clever
And know what
Life's about

Why must it
Take forever
To sort
Your problems out

You've no thought
For our feelings
Or respect for
What we think

While you resent
That we need feeding
When you don't have
Cash for drink

You complain
We're far too young
To understand
Your trials

Well in this case
It's not the children
Who're acting
Like a child

You both believe
That you're the victim
Of the other's
Poisoned mind

But if your eyes
Can still open
You might see
The only crime's

Neglect of
Your own kids
All three
Ripped apart

By being used
As silent weapons
Against your
Other half

How dare you
Claim us as conscripts
To fight
Your filthy war

When the offence
That we committed
Was only
Being born

You'd never think
You're guilty
But if you'd any
Common sense

You'd see the last thing
Left in common
Is we've all got
No defence

New Poetry from Lauren Davis: "The Flowers You Brought Back From Italy"



FACES TUMBLING DOWNWARD / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Each time I open my notebook the pages stick.
Because I've forgotten.

And onto the ground
they fall:
royal purple flowers fall
out,
emerald stemmed, blue veined,
life
from the coast of Italy.

You pulled them from the earth,
pinched their feet
with your fingertips,

you breathed into the sea

and thought of the way my hair
swayed between my shoulders,
while you once walked behind me
near an American riverside,

flowers sway in the field
the same way.

You placed the poppies then
into the spine of your bible
you pressed it,
punched the face
and rubbed the back
onto the ground
to release water
into sacred words
you pressed,
wanting me there
and you breathed into the sea.

Yesterday, you stood in the kitchen
of your new house
while the songbirds in the yard
called *good morning*,
you opened your bible
and pulled the flowers up
by the end of their stems
like tails,
their faces
tumbling downward

and I opened myself / my notebook
and tossed the flowers into
my spine / my book's spine

and there
I closed it
and pressed it into the granite
underneath
to press
wanting to stay there with you
out.

You asked me:
when again do you leave?
Two weeks.

Now,
one-thousand miles away
the pages stick
each time I open my notebook

and onto the ground they
fall,

and I remember how
you must have looked
collecting purple poppies
by the sea of Italy.

Our modern lives,
so set apart,
both
by miles
and unsteadiness.

New Poetry from Scott Janssen: “Bottle Tree”



VIETNAM DID I / *image by Amalie Flynn*

On my first visit I asked
A stock question about
Whether you'd been in the military.

Marines, nineteen sixty-six, you said,

A hint of menace in your eyes.
I never talk about it.

On my way out the door
I asked your wife about a
Tree in the front yard,

Its branches capped with
Blue and green and pink
Bottles made of glass.

It's a bottle tree, she said.
Pointing at a cobalt blue bottle
Glinting with sunlight,

She told me it had
Special power to lure in
Ghosts and lurking spirits.

They get trapped in there, she said.
Then sunlight burns them up
So they can't haunt us anymore.

Eight months later
You could no longer walk.
I rolled your wheelchair

Onto the warbled porch
Where we sat and talked
About how rough life is.

I never told you about
Vietnam, did I? You whispered.
I shook my head.

As you spoke,
Your eyes averted,
I looked at that cobalt blue bottle

And imagined it slowly filling

With blood and shrieks
And grief and the sound of

Rotor blades and the smell
Of burning flesh and the
Taste of splattered gore

And the sensation of
Adrenaline pulsing and
Memories of home and

Buddies who were killed
And of fear and rage and
betrayal and weeping

That lodge in your throat
Before you swallow
It all down

Into your belly.
Don't ever tell anyone
About this, you said,

Your hands trembling,
Jaw shivering.
I asked if there was

Anything else.
You started to say something
But stopped yourself.

No, you said.

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?

New Poem from Nazli Karabiyikoglu: “Hymn: A Coffin at the Gates of Topkapi”



COLD SONGS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

The head, decapitated,
it sits on a shore, at some corner of the world.
Desperation is what they feel as blood gushes out from the
half-neck.
Death, however, has always been there,
nothing new, an enslaving event.
The name of the deal was predefined –
“flight”. It has been around since the Order of Assassins.
Part of us see the beauty in all this, even when the tortures
last
till the moon starts to shine over us.
Sir!
There you lie, your frail length almost pours out from the
bed.
And here I am, by your side, barren inside,
yet my mind replays a moment with you,
where you feed me freshly-picked strawberries.
My worst nightmare is finding a way into my life,
into you, through your flesh and bones
yet my heart replays a moment with you,
where you dress me with freshly-picked strawberries.
Sir!
Many calls for prayer have been sung.
And here I am, can't look away.

My devotion may be in vein, but what I'm losing now is transcendental.

You missed most of it, as they held a mirror to your nose and checked if you still breathed. So beautifully you lay there.

Before this fate, I was as effective as a human shield.

Here I am, bitter as rock, by the frilled duvets, thinking how we must keep you alive and not sickly-yellow and quiet like this.

See? I'm here by the frilled duvets, ice cold, thinking how I crave to coil up next to you.

Sir!

We finally made peace with death. First our eyes watched the floors, then our fists beat our chests. Distances reached, horizons obtained, flasks of scarce water and worn sheaths. Almost everyone lost their sons to this war. Our sons. Our people. They believed in the protection of their shields and wanted to go as far as it got them, is that why we say our hymns for our sons, on and on for days? Is this our fate?

I decided I'll surpass fate and kismet and luck or whatever. So here I am, standing before that reckless hope. I grabbed it by the chin, pushed it against a wall and I let anger take control. I asked it, and I was quite sincere about it too, "How is it that death gets in?"

The way you put your head on my head, lifeless, breathless, heavy.

Your word is my law, and I stand by its chime.

With largest oceans behind my back,

you were my creation, and I gave you away.

Your first steps, your first words, have been my challenge.

And the way you put your shoulders on my legs.

Sir!

Greatest storms whirled inside me, and, oh, I prayed
to the Almighty; to His holiness, I presented all of my
organs,

but they pulled out my womb, or what's left of it,
and even then, all that mattered was you, sir.

Something penetrates, once, twice, my spleen
watches it happen, smells pleasant, like linden, my
favorite, something to go for a child is being
created, from the char of my liver, my flesh puffs,
my flesh grows fat,
count those things that penetrate me, arms maybe,
one, two and three,
stop there, stop at the second syllable of my name,
I did not do this to
me, I did not choose to carry this burden

Beings must produce, yet I'm barren inside.

Your look is my law, and I stand by its tingle.

With vastest moors behind me

you were my darling, and I gave you away.

Your first words, *my sultan, your highness*, have been my
challenge.

Beings must produce, yet I'm barren inside, and you're lovely
inside.

That's what you said

All this glory and all these gifts, what use do
they serve, I pondered for
a long time and I could not find the answer. I knit
for a long time, laces
and wools too, wore them in the cold maroon rooms
of this palace, in
the cold of my own body, cold, songs were cold, my

violin was warm,
only to me. They took me right away, and no
surprise there, I was
pretty, I stayed quiet when they split my legs, but
I'm known for
kicking quite hard. How funny, the way things
change so much so fast,
we were a thousand and now I'm just one, do the
winds always bring injustice with them or does it
travel in the pockets of soldiers?

Crying my lungs out, biting my tongue, fires scorching my
stomach, do these all go together for me now?

Or have I just comprehended death and broken apart while at
it?

If we can't breathe where the dead go,
tears can flood, for the duration of the earth's age even,
quail with rice or grape compost.

He found his place in the history books
as did I.

It takes courage to stand before a dagger; I did,
I stood still as a brick and I shed tears.

If it wasn't for your shadow, I'd call you my child,
my life, my signature, the one that makes me get lost in those
oceans.

Don't be hurt, because I'm ordinary, I think you'll outlive
me.

You'll have no idea though how we managed to get that life out
of you.

I bit my tongue, held back at every chance, and saved the pain
along my spine.

My womb dried off and shrunk, they pulled it out, but I
will not give up on your scent.

I yearn for your chest to rise up to the highest,
for you to take one deep breath.

If it wasn't for your soul, I'd call you my child,
my flesh, my bone, the one that makes a prisoner out of me.

Don't be hurt, because I'm ordinary, you'll outlive me.
I think I see the blue of your eyes again, yes.
You'll have no idea though, what getting that life out of you
cost us.
I bit every part of me within my reach, saved the pain deep in
me.
The nightingale dried off and shrunk, they pulled it out of
me,
but I will not give up on you.
How hard it was to bring you to life!
If it wasn't for your soul, I'd call you my child.

Sign off my sentence, my tears are my sin.
Tightly tie the rope around my neck
and tightly tie a knot to the rope that goes nowhere.

Translator's Note: *The story, although fiction, sits in actual history, and gives us some pointers towards having an understanding of era and geography. Topkapi Palace is in modern day Turkey, and was mostly used as the emperor's residency during the Ottoman Empire's rule between 13th and early 20th century. The Order of Assassins, Hashashiyah or Hashishiyya, was a radical Nizari Isma'ili sect that assassinated Muslim and Christian leaders before that time period. The ordeal of flight, as in the work towards enabling humans to fly by any means, caused controversy in the Muslim world in the past, since it is simply unnatural for humans to fly, but attempts are encountered in Ottoman history. The story, too, is likely placed in a time period where such attempts stir political balances.*

New Poetry from Jacquelyn Cope: “Mission 376: Patient X,” “Prolonged Exposure Therapy,” “Doxies and Rum”



THERE'S EARTH INSIDE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

MISSION 376: PATIENT X

There's dirt in his mouth now

you

know that for sure.

There's Earth inside his bloated belly

you

know that for sure.

The worms might have eaten away his ragged skin by now
but the metal is still there.

Splayed on the satin or cotton lining
like sad coins of a wishing well.

His casket might be oak, or cherry wood

you hope it was something sleek
and aesthetically pleasing

you hope the flag was soft enough
for hands and cheeks that needed touching.

PROLONGED EXPOSURE THERAPY

Ten minutes staring at
a fountain pen stabbing,
scribbling paper.

A rocket hit a concrete wall
I told her.

Water spots on bifocal glasses
blurring iris's, flickering like
burnt out pixels on a screen.

A desk placard bolded
with professional credentials
hooraying the study of mental illness.

A rocket hit a concrete wall and

Tic-tacs shaking in my red purse
snapping the container at its neck
revealing the candied-mint nonsense
delaying my esophagus to stretch
in the direction of answer.

A rocket hit a C-130 fuel tank spraying
shrapnel

Her voice dives
down into the depths
of her vocal cords
pulling out
forced tonal sympathy
an octave of care.

*If
you'd like, I can prescribe you Zoloft today.*

The rocket hit a concrete wall
the metal
a rocket
hit
the fuel tank
a concrete
w
a
l
l

DOXIES AND RUM

My Dachshund

watches me pour

my

third

Coke.

bowed legs sit

under

his robust

chest.

beaming

in judgment

Morgan's

leg
swung firmly

a barrel

he winks, opens his mouth

howls a whistling screech

rum and

firmly

chocolate colored

not

but acceptance.

Captain

resting on

and

His

Eyes

a
rocket's screech.

A
hand over his mouth

him. I quiet

Pouring
the rest in the empty glass

ice breaks up the

dissolving
into
themselves.

sugar, caramel, Spice,

washes away the
dryness in my throat

and
salt from the sinuses stuck there.

Salt that I refuse
to expel

any
natural way.

My Doxie jumps on
my lap

smelling
distinctly of corn chips

for
no reason at all.

He rests his head
in the crevice

of my arm

sighing deeper

than

I thought he could.

New Poetry from Mbizo Chirasha: “Casava Republics,” “Sad Revolutionary Lullabies,” “Rhetorics”



SUNSETS OF POLITICAL MASTURBATION / *image by Amalie Flynn*

**CASAVA
REPUBLICS**

Juba

Child of lost sperm in sunsets of
political masturbation

Wagadugu

Deadline of our
revolutions

Darfur

Constipated stomach ,disease ravaged,
bloodless dozing monk.

Nairobi

Culture lost in the dust of Saxon lexicon
and gutter slang

Soweto

Xenophobia
Drunk and Afro-phobia sloshed.

Marikana

Cervical blister of the unfinished
revolution fungi.

Harare

Corruption polonium deforming elders into
political hoodlums

Congo

Lodge of secessionists and human
guillotines

SAD REVOLUTIONARY LULLABIES

.....Sing songs of afghan circumcised,

Damascus masturbating bullets

Sing *Belafonte* Sing!

Of
revolutions that never crawled, sing!

Lumumba, see whiz kids castrating
political gods

Nkurumah, see them mutilating
revolutionary goddesses

Sing *Kunta*, Sing *Kinte*

I am tired of revolutions importing
colonial mood,

Propaganda decayed pimps frying anthems
like *frikadels*

Tired savages roasting constitutions in
corruption oil pans

Sing songs of freedoms that never walked,
Sing!

RHETORICS

Mandela, the summer sun that rose through
rubbles of our winter

Gadafi and Sadamu making *shadufs* and
pyramids

..... . another spring

Obama and Osama pulling rich political
carrot in *Segorong*

Robin Island slept golden nightmares and

charcoal dreams,

Soweto virgins cracking their under feet
in the long walk to freedom

Faces carrying the burden of freedom and
anthems.

New Poetry from D.A. Gray: “Mosul Reflections,” “St. Martin in the City,” “The Rearview Has Two Faces”



STOMACH OF A COUNTRY / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Mosul Reflections

Ten years and the place is not the same.
Memory of green hills in a dry land,
cratered by what fell from the sky.
I don't know whether to trust the image
on the screen or the one in my mind.

One I only knew as Sayyd gave well water,
sweet tea and mince meat on laffa.
We were tired from the spring rains,
three days in the stomach of the country,
we sank into the hard wooden benches
and we ate.

I thought of Jonah, not wanting
to travel here, and when he did, enraged

at an apocalypse that never came –
how he rested under a bush then watched
it die.

The father of the family smiled
as I ate – both of us, with time, smiling.

Dost thou well to be angry?

His child in the corner never took her
eyes off me. Her mother would glance
over, expressionless, as if waiting
for something that never happened.

Rain fell like mortars, knocking the edges
from the dirt roads, craters in the middle.
In a few minutes it would take us with it,
descending. We'd see the fragments,
some carved reliefs; we'd wondered
what we'd destroyed, what we'd left
the world – an image of broken rock
in need of a makeshift savior.

St. Martin in the City

Hunger sometimes reaches up
grabs your cloak while you're riding.
You can't shield your eyes,
or go into hiding.
Every treasure you've carried home,
is never enough.
A beggar beside the road, lifts his head;
loose skin and sullen,
he shivers and so do you.

* * *

The day before we shipped
I was walking with Preacher

into the Walgreens for cold
medicine and we saw a man
asking for change. 'Pity it
couldn't be him,' Preacher said,
not waiting while I fished for coins.

Since returning the eyes
of every refugee leap
out of every face.

* * *

The stuff of nightmares.

Suffering
you thought you knew.

Sometimes it happens, a hand
reaches out and causes
you to draw back – until
you see your fear in their eyes

both surprised how easily
the veil between you parts.

The Rearview Has Two Faces

Your memory has two faces. The thought occurs
as you adjust your mirror in the chapel parking lot.

The eulogy's done its job, a few tears from even
the most stoic, stone-faced ground pounders,
the cracks in the First Sergeant's voice as he belts
'Smithson,' once, twice and again – as he waits
for a response that never comes.

If you believe

the words -
he defended the abstraction of freedom with every fiber,

never showed late, said his prayers, and flossed.
You remember an emails he sent. 'When I get back,
there's a lineman job in Oklahoma. And the houses
are cheap.' Days before he did it.

You remember

the night
on your property, shooting empties off fence posts.
'I'm not going back,' he said. And you knew he would.
Frustrating as hell but reliable. And you'd rather
have sincere doubt than cocksure and careless.

The sun from the East burns the side of your face
through the driver's side window. In the rearview
you can see your left side turning red.

Yeah.

The night he told you, you didn't sleep, agonized over
what to do about what he hadn't done yet.

And when he showed that morning, early,
two full duffel bags and a goofy grin, you chided
yourself for doubting.

You look one more time.

Sometimes he's there sitting in the back seat,
an afterimage lingering after the flash has burned,
you still trying to regain your vision.

Three Poems from Suzanne Rancourt



EXPLODE / *image by Amalie Flynn*

The Shoes That Bore Us

It is a dream of kind slippers that coddle bunions appeased
by hands mittened as the same kind slippers
holding warmth as forgiveness for all the combat boots
sogged by brackish muck of wars
when not hoisted in the occasional stilettos of never regrets
a conundrum of cognitive dissonance stabs the dreams
of where ever we had been, we escape to now over racked rails
rocked goat paths and deer runs you think it's a man's world
until
it is not

a sidearm presses to a right hip as cupped palms to iliac
crests
walking boundaries and borders skirting domains of
possibilities
that astrological forecasts stagger out on slow printed pages
like stammering promises spoken by the dead selling real
estate,
"Check Mate"
no choice is a lie when the inevitable is an illusion, no
freeze to suffice
that fighting, although futile,
is still taking a stand

Unhinged Again

a stone leaves the hand that flung it-air escapes
constricted vocal cords – a vomiting wild – enraged urgency
and angst

kinetic makes contact – leaves bruises the color of bludgeoned
fists pounding flesh is quiet. I can't remember if I was
screaming

my face and shielding hands turned overripe plum purple
sweet with sticky juice that dribbles down chins

attracts sugar bees you swat in autumn sun
that smells of maple leaves red with change

this hammer drives the firing pin into a child's memory, my
memory, of cap guns
explode a thousand times greater than a simple pop & puff

a chunk of lead propelled, is unhinged
from the mansplaining – the antagonistic prod of condescending
joust

I was stuck in a ring of double fisted doubts: leave don't
leave

I didn't know that I was a prisoner of white picket conditions

like my mother. Was she also a prisoner? A side bar of
recollection

a nursery rhyme my mother sang to me:

“Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater, had a wife and couldn't keep
her

He put her in a pumpkin shell, and there he kept her very
well.”

I know my Mother knew when I was being beaten
there – my face laying with one ear pressed to cold linoleum

the other, an upward funnel catching my Mother's vengeful
whisper

“get up...get up...fight”

to be marginalized – a side note or comment, placed in the
periphery, only seen

when the reader desires or deems worthy of notice

only one of us walked from that house that day

to be silenced – a voice, a room, a home, a door closed upon
it

a mind made up, barred entrance, not worth the time to view,

hear, acknowledge

I'm writing this and telling you words are a privilege

voice is a human right thrown as stones – they fall from the wind

Crying Over Continents

windfarms

white wake of ferries

channel crossing

a nonstop jack hammer knee

Morse code through time zones

pounding out instructions, the next destination

I'm not letting go like I used to. I feel heavier

in my gathering of nuances, intimacies –

You watch someone for hours, days

you learn what time they take their dog for a shit

turn on the garage light – the one just right of the workbench

and always with their left hand

You learn to recognize the screams of a woman

in an upstairs back bedroom being struck

or the subtle moans of make up sex easing across the back yard

from windows never locked and left half open

Or maybe,

it's the man in the downstairs apartment under yours

that you watch shaving his son's head before forcing

the kid to wear a chain and crucifix bigger than the kid's

malnourished chest with ribs that break at 0200 hrs

when Dad comes home drunk, no sex, and vile. The mother

died mysteriously, they say, in a different town, a different country

Intimacy is being there as a ghost

being fed the compromise of "I'll never do it again"

Intimacy is being there at the end
and being held in the mantle of a dying eye

Poetry from Bryan Blanchard: "Pillar of Salt" and "The Mannequin"

Pillar of Salt

Raining fire, burning steel ...
And now I see haunted

Images of headless
Bodies bathed in bloodstained

Sand of a mannequin
Head with a swollen face

And lifeless eyes looking
Back at an explosion,

A disfigured Humvee
Staggering down the road,

A charred and gaping door,
A torso hanging out –



Sketch by Sarah Blanchard

The Mannequin

I am not a mannequin!
I am a pillar of salt!
I am the salt of the earth!
My heart is heavy with sand.

An earlier version of "Pillar of Salt" appeared in [O-Dark-Thirty](#), March 11, 2013.