

GHAYATH ALMADHOUN

Details

Do you know why people die when they are pierced by a bullet?
Because 70% of the human body is made up of water
Just as if you made a hole in a water tank.

Was it a random clash dancing at the head of the alley when I passed
Or was there a sniper watching me and counting my final steps?

Was it a stray bullet
Or was I a stray man even though I'm a third of a century old?

Is it friendly fire?
How can it be
When I've never made friends with fire in my life?

Do you think I got in the way of the bullet
Or it got in my way?
So how am I supposed to know when it's passing and which way it will go?

Is an encounter with a bullet considered a crash in the conventional sense
Like what happens between two cars?
Will my body and my hard bones smash its ribs too

And cause its death?
Or will it survive?

Did it try to avoid me?
Was my body soft?
And did this little thing as small as a mulberry feel female in my maleness?

The sniper aimed at me without bothering to find out that I'm allergic to snipers' bullets
And it's an allergy of a most serious kind, and can be fatal.

The sniper didn't ask my permission before he fired, an obvious example of the lack of civility that has become all too common these days.

I was exploring the difference between revolution and war when a bullet passed through my body, and extinguished a torch lit by a primary school teacher from Syria acting in cooperation with a Palestinian refugee who had paid with his land to solve anti-Semitism in Europe and been forced to emigrate to a place where he met a woman who was like memories.

It was a wonderful feeling, like eating an ice cream in winter, or having unprotected sex with a woman you don't know in a city you don't know under the influence of cocaine, or...

A passerby tells me half of what he wants to tell me so I believe him then we stab each other like two lovers, a woman beckons to me to follow her so I do and we have a child who looks like betrayal, a sniper kills me so I die,

the sky falls on the passersby so the tourists flee, the sky falls on the passersby
and my heart doesn't flee, the sky falls upwards so a poet commits collective
suicide in his room even though he was alone that evening.

That evening oblivion attacked me unawares, so I bought the memory of a soldier
who hadn't returned from war, and when I noticed the flaw in the time, I couldn't
find a place of exile appropriate to my wound so I decided not to die again.

The city is older than the memories, the curse is fenced in by melancholy, time
is late for its appointments, walls enclose time with monotony, death looks
like my face, the poet leans on a woman in his poem, the general marries
my wife, the city vomits its history and I swallow the streets and the crowd
swallows me, I, who distribute my blood to strangers, and share a bottle of
wine with my solitude, beg you, send my body by express mail, distribute my
fingers equally between my friends.

This city is bigger than a poet's heart and smaller than his poem, but it is big
enough for the dead to commit suicide without troubling anyone, for traffic
lights to bloom in the suburbs, for a policeman to become part of the solution
and the streets a mere background to truth.

That evening, when my heart stumbled, a woman from Damascus took hold
of me and taught me the alphabet of her desire, I was lost between God whom
the shaykh planted in my heart and God whom I touched in her bed,
that evening,
my mother was the only one who knew I would never return,
my mother was the only one who knew,
my mother was the only,
my mother.

I sold my white days on the black market, and bought a house overlooking the war, and the view was so wonderful that I could not resist its temptation, so my poem deviated from the shaykh's teachings, and my friends accused me of cutting myself off, I put kohl on my eyes and became more Arab, and drank camel's milk in a dream and woke up as a poet, I was watching the war like lepers watch people's eyes, and had arrived at frightening truths about poetry and the white man, about the season of migration to Europe, and about cities that receive tourists in peacetime and mujahidin in wartime, about women who suffer too much in peacetime, and become fuel for the war in wartime.

In a reconstructed city like Berlin lies a secret that everyone knows, which is that the...

No, I will not repeat what is known, but I will tell you something you don't know: the problem with war is not those who die, but those who remain alive after the war.

It was the most beautiful war I've been in in my life, full of metaphors and poetic images, I remember how I used to sweat adrenalin and piss black smoke, how I used to eat my flesh and drink screams, death with his scrawny body leaned on the destruction committed by his poem, and wiped his knife clean of my salt, and the city rubbed my shoes with her evening and the street smiled and the city counted the fingers of my sorrow and dropped them on the road leading to her, death weeps and the city remembers the features of her killer and sends me a stabbing by post, threatening me with happiness, and hangs my heart out on her washing line strung between two memories, and oblivion pulls me towards myself, deeply towards myself, deeply, so my language falls on morning, and balconies fall on songs, headscarves on kisses, back streets on women's bodies, the details of alleyways on history, the city falls on the cemeteries, dreams fall on the prisons, the poor on joy, and I fall on memory.

When I became a member of the Union of the Dead, my dreams improved and I began to practice yawning freely, and despite the drums of war singing close to my bloated body I had plenty of time to befriend a stray dog, who chose not to eat from my corpse despite his hunger, and was content to sleep by my feet.

A number of people tried to pull me out of the way, but the sniper argued with his gun so they changed their minds, he was an honorable sniper, worked honestly, and didn't waste time or people.

That little hole,
Remaining after the bullet had passed through,
Emptied me of my contents,
Everything flowed out gently,
Memories,
Names of friends,
Vitamin C,
Wedding songs,
The Arabic dictionary,
The temperature of 37 degrees,
Uric acid,
The poems of Abu Nuwas,
And my blood.

The moment the soul begins to escape through the little gate the bullet has opened, things become clearer, the theory of relativity turns into something self-evident, mathematical equations that used to be vague become a simple matter, the names of classmates we've forgotten come back to us, life is suddenly illuminated in perfect detail, the childhood bedroom, mother's milk, the first trembling orgasm, the streets of the camp, the portrait of Yasser Arafat, the smell of coffee with cardamom inside the house, the sound of the morning call to prayer, Maradona in Mexico in 1986, and you.

Just as if you are eating your beloved's fingers, or suckling from an electric cable, or being inoculated against shrapnel, just as if you are a memory thief, come, let's give up poetry, exchange the songs of summer for gauze dressings and harvest poems for surgical thread, leave your kitchen and the children's bedroom and follow me so that we can drink tea behind the sandbags, the massacre has room for everyone, put your dreams in the shed and give the plants on the balcony plenty of water, for the discussion with iron may go on for a while, leave behind Rumi, Averroes and Hegel, and bring along Machiavelli and Huntington and Fukuyama, for we need them now, leave behind your laughter, your blue shirt and warm bed, and bring your teeth and nails and hunting knife, and come.

Throw away the Arab Renaissance and bring on the inquisition,
Throw away European civilization and bring on the Kristallnacht,
Throw away socialism and bring on Joseph Stalin,
Throw away Rimbaud's poems and bring on the slave trade,
Throw away Michel Foucault and bring on the AIDS virus,
Throw away Heidegger's philosophy and bring on the purity of the Aryan race,
Throw away Hemingway's sun that also rises and bring on the bullet in the head,
Throw away Van Gogh's starry sky and bring on the severed ear,
Throw away Picasso's Guernica and bring on the real Guernica with its smell of
fresh blood,
We need these things now, we need them to begin the celebration.

BERT STABLER

Antediluvia

I was laid off from my art teaching job at a neighborhood high school on Chicago's south side in July 2011, and the books I brought back from my art classroom I stored in my basement. My basement later flooded, and I let the books dry out for several weeks. This beautiful book of Black Panther photography by Stephen Shame, along with dozens of other lovely books, was ruined. This series was created by scanning what happened after I tore it open, and the pages had fused into this symmetrical meditation on division and stratification. I was rehired two weeks later, and we went on strike just over a year after that.