

from War Rug (pages 1-12)

by Francesco Levato

Flash a body reduced to beads of glass

fused in sand at the blast point's edge.

Filigree

the lace of an exposed cheek
over tooth and jaw;

impossibly white.

Pause the space between light

and the rush of sound that crushes breath
from Kevlar and rib;

a moment of clarity

before the market erupts, before
the Humvee pitches, then drops to its side.

Afterimage

a thickening of scar tissue, the absence
of expression, of an eardrum,

of an iris.

[Definitions

Enucleation: Complete surgical removal of the eyeball.

Evisceration: Surgical removal of the contents of the eyeball with retention of the sclera or cornea and sclera.

Exenteration: Surgical removal of all the eyeball contents which may include the removal of the eyelids.

Ocular Prosthesis: A plastic or glass fabricated eye that replaces volume of the enucleated eye socket.]

It begins with a photograph and a rug; that so much can be woven into both, one in dyed wool, the other scar tissue against the undisturbed surface of her hand. It's in her eyes. I know it's cliché but *look*, there is something there—unsaid. Resignation, resolve, or just “God damn it, we've planned this since high school, you will *not* take this away from me too.” She is in white, he a dress uniform, three-quarter view. The eye facing the camera is glass—impenetrable.

The rug is tribal, meant for prayer. It is one of the few things I kept. They say the weaving of bombs into its borders, machine guns and tanks began during the Russian occupation; now the images are of planes en route, buildings on fire, the flag—American.

How do you move 1,000 pounds of concrete,
separate bodies from debris,
twisted as steel bar
at the exposed edge of a wound;

in the expanse of aftermath, broken pieces
a uniform shade of red,

how do you know your own;

how do you reconcile

the hand held is no longer attached, phantom pain
is the body missing limb, not the reverse;

that you still wake in your clothing
between adrenaline and exhaustion,

that the year begins as it ended, will end
as it began?

The T-shirt reads *Kill 'em all. Let God sort 'em out*; skull on black cotton, 3XL. They say 20,000 to 100,000 were killed, the exact number in dispute. What makes this a crusade, what number a massacre? In 1209 AD crusaders asked how to tell Catholics from heretics—the response, from the Latin, Kill them all. God—will know his own.

[IMAGE:

Relatives of the victims with corpses
outside Baghdad's al-Kindi hospital.]

[Emergency Condition Responses

Code Green: cut hand, scrape, broken arm, nausea, and headache.

Code Yellow: decreased level of consciousness, chest pain, unconsciousness for unknown reason, loss of feeling/motor skills in an extremity.

Code Red: penetrating trauma to the torso, severe loss of blood, severe head injury, and chest pain followed by unconsciousness.

Code Blue: no breathing/no heartbeat.

Code Black: Rigor mortis, Post mortem lividity, decapitation, decomposition, etc.]

Black the ash from a burning car

 the color of lung tissue, of sutures,
dried blood where glass

 made ribbons of skin;

it is what deepens over ribcage,
tells of fracture, of the grind

 of bone against bone;

it is a body wrapped in cellophane,
packed in ice, the bag

 in which it is zippered,

the color of digging to the height of a man,
of clawing one's face, that of soil

 held tightly in hand.

[CARTRIDGE, 7.62MM, ARMOR PIERCING

used in rifles and machine guns against personnel
and light armored or unarmored targets;

a hollow cinder block, both sides of a car body,

internal walls, partitions, plaster, floors, ceilings,
office furniture, home appliances,

and bedding can be easily penetrated.]

Bedding. Penetrated. The Bushmaster Chain Gun™ meets the warfighter's needs. The brochure tells that it is more flexible, reliable than others; among its attributes—scaleable lethality.

Again black; the background of a magazine ad, glossy stock. It reads *Over 120 models with one thing in common... inspired by the human hand.* The image is of fingers curled around nothing, suggesting the grip of a gun. Is it the gloss, the implied wetness that is allure? Or the fingers on the verge of tightening—the spasm that would follow.

Ten paces from this doorway
a hollow of stone
not so much shelter

as a wall against which
to flatten my back
continue to count

a breath of a pause, six round burst
two second hold, one
single crack

and twenty more paces

from this wall to his body,
his body to doorway, my back
to that wall.

[Definitions

Penetration: The tissue through which the projectile passes, and which it disrupts or destroys.

Permanent Cavity: The volume of space once occupied by tissue that has been destroyed by the passage of the projectile.

Fragmentation: Projectile pieces or secondary fragments of bone which are impelled outward from the permanent cavity and may sever muscle tissues, blood vessels, etc.]

– *First published in XCP: Cross Cultural Poetics*

from War Rug (pages 13-15)

She knows this stain its name softer
than shelter
 than the word for concrete
in her native tongue,
 its edge still ragged
 where meat was pressed raw
into blast-proof walls.

Is there language for this

 for a roof that should have held
as bombs fell, a whistle from within

how stillness comes with understanding
this returning
 to such a place

there is a word
it means inhabited means haunted.

[BAGHDAD, IRAQ

The two American “smart” bombs worked perfectly,
striking

what the Pentagon had identified as an Iraqi
command and control center during the 1991 Gulf War.

The 2,000-pound laser-guided bombs burrowed
through 10 feet of hardened concrete

and detonated,

punching a gaping hole in the Amiriyah bomb shelter

—and incinerating 408 Iraqi civilians.]

Monologue:

Inhabited. Haunted. The word in Arabic is *maskoon*. It speaks
of both the living and the dead; it is uncertainty, lacks clarity
like that of *smart* when applied to bomb, like *collateral* as in
damage, as incidental—as insignificant.

from War Rug (pages 30-37)

[Definitions

Exsanguination: to drain of blood; make bloodless;
to bleed to death.]

[NOTIFICATION

Do not hurry, be as natural as possible in speech, manner,
and method of delivery.

“The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep
regret that your (*relationship; son, daughter, husband, wife; etc.*)
(*died/was killed in action*) in (*country/state*) on (*date*)—

when a rocket-propelled grenade struck his Bradley
Fighting Vehicle; when their team came under small
arms fire while clearing a village; when mortar rounds
hit their camp; when their vehicle hit a land mine;
when enemy forces ambushed them; when a grenade
was thrown near his foot patrol; when he encountered
enemy fire; when he was accidentally struck by a tank;

*

when their Kiowa Warrior came under small arms attack and crashed; from an explosion during breaching operations; when insurgents attacked their unit with rockets; while conducting counter-terrorism operations; during an air assault mission; from injuries suffered by enemy grenade fire; in a convoy that was attacked by a suicide—; when he jumped into the Euphrates River to take a swim, and did not resurface;

*

of injuries sustained from an enemy hand grenade; from enemy indirect fire; when a landmine detonated near his vehicle; while conducting combat operations against enemy forces; when his traffic control point came under mortar attack; when a vehicle struck them; after being shot by an Iraqi army soldier on a coalition base; when a suicide car bomber attacked their vehicle; when terrorists attacked his patrol; as a result—of hostile action;

*

of injuries suffered when their vehicle was struck by a roadside bomb; when an IED detonated near her patrol; when a vehicle approached their unit, and the driver detonated a bomb; when his tank was attacked with an improvised explosive device; when a makeshift bomb exploded near his unit; when an improvised explosive device struck a nearby vehicle; when an improvised explosive device—detonated.

The Secretary extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic loss.”]

Should a limb be bent
in quite that way, an ankle

have so extreme a twist

I know
that boot to be mine

it's the way it hangs
from the steering wheel, how
its laces are still tied

that doesn't make sense.

[Definitions

Amputation: The loss or absence of all or part of a limb.

Bilateral: A double amputee. Both legs or both arms.

Disarticulation: An amputation through a joint: the hip, shoulder, knee, ankle, elbow, or wrist.

Prosthesis: An artificial part of the body.

Residual limb: The remaining portion of a limb after amputation, also called the “stump”.]

Monologue:

The technology is considered breakthrough; an ankle that rotates, a foot that can flex. Its internal battery will propel you forward, its steel spring—support your weight.

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