

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.