WAR NEWS

Beau Beausoleil
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Cover art: Andrea Hassiba
These days
you wrap
the shroud
of living
tight
around
your bones
and try
to breathe
again
above each
lengthening
grave
War
News

There is
nothing
left in
our poems
but
obliterated
words
War
News

Many believe that the sky above us is shared

While others claim ownership of every cloud that falls to earth covered in blood
War
News

The volume of the killing is so high so terrible in its working machinery that we can hear it in our sleep.

We get up and roam the house looking for our own distressed body in the piercing fragments of news.

And in the early morning we will begin to hold ourselves in the arms of our children.
Revenge reawakens every known atrocity and sends its lethal messengers from street to street from door to door relentlessly searching for the grief of others
In the trench with Mahmoud Darwish and Siegfried Sassoon I ask for directions to Gaza.

Follow the gunfire through your mother's heart they reply as one.

Follow the blown apart paper future and the rotting corpses of mercy.

And once there bury your writing below the bodies of children.
But don't
look for any
beginning
or end

Or consult
any map
of poetry
to bring
you home
without
tears
War
News

In 24 hours you must leave behind what is left of your life.

And on every day in a future nightmare you will be allowed to return to it.
These days recalling a line from a poem that you love is like being granted temporary safe passage through the collective unconscious of violence.
War
News

Nothing will go back to the way it was

Nothing will look the same as it was

Only the deep emptiness of loss will be the same

Only the barriers to freedom will be recognizable

And made Stronger
War
News

How can I help explain one day to our daughter's twin girls how it is that we take the lives of one another

And never give them back
It's 5 a.m. here in California on October 15th 2023 and I can see Death pacing in our garden.

His spirit outlined by the darkest of dead stars.

He is looking east waiting impatiently for the first screams to reach his purpose.

He looks up at me standing at the kitchen window.

I am still trying to see into his impenetrable rapacious desire.

He is soon to leave and stay.
Always clutching his
blood-soaked list
of the innocents

Always asking me
to choose the first
of many for him

By simply turning
my back
on what I can
plainly see
War News
(October 16th 2023)

Is this enough death and misery?

Will it be enough tomorrow or the day after?

Tell us what metrics are being used

Are they adding in pain and anguish

subtracting the last shreds of freedom

Or the number of people killed in a single family

Must the multiplier of revenge be added
into each answer

And who is searching the bodies of children for a pencil and a crumpled sheet or shroud of lined paper from school on which to add things up for another generation
So much of what I write is from an almost lost moment just before forgetting.

Except for the Palestinian voices that I hear and read that keep crying out that there is nowhere to go that is safe for them.

Those pursuing desperate words reach me in an unending terrifying present tense of death that consumes my poems even as I write them.
Those who are doing the killing always want to kill a few more.

Those living at the edge of the abyss still have to be forced to jump.
We passed
a playground
full of children
at play

their voices rising
and falling
like small
quick seasons

We
could not
make out
a single
word as
children
ran and
climbed
laughed
and whispered
together

But hearing
their
rambunctious
voices was a
nurturing
gift in itself

And today
reading
the ongoing
news
of this war
I think about
the violently
silenced lives
of so many
children
and the joyous voices
that will never be
heard again
I press down on the words in my small poems forcing them to be still to listen to the sound of a heart weeping so close so very far away
In the midst of all the killing, God has become the first stranger that we encounter in the morning and the last survivor that we bid farewell to each night.
I read this war like a novel of tragedy and try to live in the last page first wanting to know how things turn out on paper well before anyone else is written into death
War
News
(October 18th
2023)

On this present leaden day there are so many destroyed bodies that there is little room for words.

One can only privately very softly sing a dirge in the street or fill an entire sky with our collective lament.

A child's shrouded name as a lyric repeated thousands upon thousands of times.
War
News

I thought
I could
contain
the war
in a jar
of words
and keep it
in our pantry
in the quiet
darkness
next to the
sour cherry
preserves that
I love so
much

I thought
to keep
the war's
painful
knowledge
sealed in
that jar
away from
my family

But each
morning
as I cut
a slice of
rye bread
and reach
for the
preserves
I notice
that the
jar has
filled with
blood again
and that
the letters
pressed against the weeping glass continue to spell my name
Once more I awake
In the frenzied silence
of the early morning

In my kitchen
I listen to the
radio accounts
of those who were
alive yesterday
at this very
same hour

And outside my front door
along the length of my street

I hear the soft steady
hooves of the dark horses
of death
carrying the souls
of sleeping children
away from their graves
These days I have no direct contact with myself and use my poems as an intermediary.

I know that the heavy sorrow in this war is weighing down my poems.

And that soon my body will refuse to carry any of my words and offer only to bring me the worn cloth of a prayer that is used to wash the dead with.
War
News

She brought news
written on
her wings
of distant
wars
in Heaven
and asked us
how to weep
and how she
might pray
herself
to sleep
I wanted
to fashion
amulets
of
protection
made
from my
poems
and send
them
to you
and your
family in
the song
of a house
sparrow

But
there
was
no
house
left
standing
on your
street

only
rubble
and
bodies
wrapped
in their
shrouds
of memory
And the sparrow was killed as it began to sing.
War
News

Who will identify the living after the dead give up on us in disgust

Who will arrange the family members for the photograph when there are no family members left

And for how long can anyone live within the violence of today

as it consumes tomorrow
Let us wear the shoes of the innocent dead and walk into their names and violently ended lives.

Let us walk under their breathless sky and demand once again that they forgive us.
War
News

The sun
has
ripped
up its
own
light
over
Gaza

Only
the
scarred
moon

which has
always
refused
to hide
its wounds

watches
1.
Bring me some words to bury in our garden

Bring me a bone whistle to play in our hallway

2.
When death releases a child from under the rubble of a home

And allows her to be pulled back into life

I am stunned with the terror of hope
War
News
(for f.r.)

I look for
the smallest
most determined
fish
that swim from
our shore
and wonder
what messages
of peace
they might
carry for you

Unless they
are caught
with so
many others
in another
tangled net
of empty
words

and die
gasping
for truth
War
News

I am fastened to the muteness of writing poems in an expanding darkness that holds the accumulation of all murdered light

And at the bottom of this infinite grave of witness

I place my name and weep
I can only save
a quarter of the
clouded
moon's light
in this poem

But it will
be safe
with me

Until you
need it
in one
of your
own poems

that they
have stolen
the very same
light from
Every word in this poem wants to leave this poem

Every word belongs to someone else far away in pain

But the word for grief stays here alone and then leaves only to come back again

Because it knows me and surely you as well
I stare harder each night at the stars we share looking for the few that might still be unbloodied in your sky
War
News

What we try to say we hear our friend say in the street

She says

I will not surrender the love I carry to anyone's violence
I use one thought
to describe another
and consider that the
doors to this room
could be unhinged
to carry my body

Along with
the body of
the one that
in the end
I could not
protect
War
News

There are
roads
that will
bring
you from
one area
of death
to another
unspecified
area of death

There are streets
that no longer exist
that will guide you

Here is the
bombed
collapsed
house
where your
mother
was killed

This is where
your Homeland
is denied its
existence
every day

This is where
the body
of your child
is still buried
under the
rubble

You know
these ghost
streets and
their dreams
by heart
And even in this raw moment of collective grief

You try to move Heaven itself to one side to find the body of your child
You turn left instead of right.
You walk to the window instead of the door.
You read a poem instead of crying.
And death is confused by your choices and luck.
And allows you a moment to recall her favorite song of lost love which ends up as a prayer that you sing.
over her body
War
News

Is it better to be killed in warm weather or cold

Is it better to die sitting or standing

Is it better to die alone or with your loved ones

Does it remain troublingly easier to read the murderous news than to live in it
What ruined body can you identify as they are pulled out from under the killing

What can you make sense of when you can't see her shy smile
Watching the wind in the trees
I recall the BBC video report from Gaza that showed assessments being made on the hospital hallway floor
these were wounded people who had just been brought in
Which ones were beyond saving and which still had a chance at life beyond this murdered day
One woman knelt next to a woman that the
doctor was leaning over

He seemed to be searching the stillness of the wounded woman's face but then he turned away to study the face of the next person.

Who was that kneeling woman who watched silent as a stone?

I could not bear her approaching grief.

Is everyone dying again under a sky that has been repeatedly torn apart?

Here in California I watched the wind as it struggled with the trees.
I could not move my body in any direction.

There is no balance between life and death.

The camera turned away but I wanted her to open her eyes and share a breath with the woman who will not leave her side.

I will hear the wind and see the two of them as one with the standing trees forever.
These dead
don't want
their bodies
written upon
by politicians

or sewn into
flags of war
that fly over
endless
cemeteries

Their names are
martyrs in any
prayer in
any language

These dead
don't want
our memory
of them
loaded
into more
violence
to kill yet
another child
whose life defines
someone's joy
I think myself
awake each morning
but the soft light
that settles on me
is filled with the
chaos of what is
killing you
I am not you
but am instead
the printed
memory of
myself thinking
of you

I wish
these terrible days
would only reside
in a poem
that one might
read or even destroy
before it is written
in this
adjacent darkness
War
News

1. What dream of being in your kitchen with the kettle whistling were you awakened from to be in this open nightmare

2. In my own awakened dream I am not surprised to see that blood has appeared in the soil of our garden
War
News

I ask God to grant mercy
to the Angels who must
witness
all of this killing

Mercy
without words
for those
who still yearn
to praise
Heaven
while enfold ing

in their white
but bloodied wings

those children who
have suffered so much
War
News

I don't want to be alone
in this poem
I want you next to me
even after the words
end

We all have a
poem
written under our
wings

I know you want
to fly above
the crushing
noise of killing
and carry
your loved ones
with you

I will wait here
beside your
shadow
my poet friend
until death finally
lowers its voice
and goes away
I struggle each day
with the Angel of
Silence
who wants to cover
my body
like steadily falling
snow

But
I do not want
that soft blanket
of childlike sleeping
in the morning quiet

while you have none
for yourself
without first dying
War
News

We slow the hours
in our poems

we imagine
the killing ending

As
best
we
can
with
words

But even so
on some
of the cruelest days
we feel like foolish liars

who are unable to see
our own lives
between the pages
War
News

I want to climb
the ridge line
here in my
California
with you

and call along
the rutted road
of war
for the dogs
of peace to
come to our
side

I want to walk
with you and
these quiet
wisdom dogs
to where
we might still hear
children at play
below the
lifting limbs
of these
fire scarred
memories of
sheltering trees
1. The hospital corridors are filled with those who need to know if they are dead.

2. The bitter kiss finds your lips as you leave the photograph of your father's father.

3. No one here is allowed to remember anymore.
War
News

Death above you
Death in front of you
Death behind you
Death to the east of you
Death to the north of you
Death to the south of you

And to the west beyond your shore is the body politic of my country

floating face down

waiting waiting

on every drowning abandoned road to peace
War
News

What can the wind see
when it climbs to the
tops of the trees

Maybe the body
of a child held
aloft by her father

Maybe killing
next to killing

Maybe the
startling
sweet call
of a living
sparrow
War
News

I try to extend the familiar
by writing of an apple
which could be on our
kitchen counter or on
a kitchen counter in
Gaza

If there still is a kitchen
not yet destroyed
along with the woman
who would have cut
the apple into slices
and made tea
out of kindness to
my age and a certain
poem that she read
about apples
so very long ago
before the war
War
News

I searched
for something
in our home
that could
hold a
small part
of our sorrow
in these days
that curse
the outcome
of my poems

I found only
a twisted piece
of volcanic fired
deep brown granite
with white striations
from the shore of
Tomales Bay
here in
California

Formed how
many millions
of lifetimes
ago
it fit into
my loose grasp
so easily as
memory

But then I noticed
that if it was held tighter
and its edges angled
toward harm
it became a weapon
that sought
anyone's desire
War
News

The light arrives
on the page of
this poem
and I
read the words
aloud to you
but not in their
written order

I want to change
the intention of killing

I want some way to
bring the random
text of days
back to before
it started
to hurt
so much

and keep
it there

I want the word
ceasefire
to see why we write it

Tonight
we will set
the garden on fire
trying to distract
ourselves again
This morning my words look like small knots of children on some playground waiting to go back into a classroom that no longer exists.

In a life that no longer exists.
We are the thief of our own chaos and trade each morning with the nearest war for another memory.
War
News

Why would anyone be in a hospital or find shelter there

unless they were a terrorist

Why would anyone dig through the rubble of their home

unless they were a terrorist

Why would anyone be directionless on a one way road

unless they were a terrorist

Why would anyone want to identify the bodies of their small children

unless they were terrorists
There is no distance that does not hold a body of witness.
I write of the weight of grief that holds one down for the length of each breath.
it is winter
in my words
and I pull
them up
like a collar
and try to
make my
way home
past your
sorrow

I look for
the soft
hills that
pull my
dreaming
closer

But all I see
are the barren
winter orchards
that stretch into
the days ahead
We have had our first winter rain and when I turned on the BBC news I saw that it was raining in Gaza

I felt even more helpless in this small detail of commonality

I stood on the sidewalk near our front door letting the rain pummel my body

and later searched in my words for the faintest echo of your falling sky
War
News

Who deserves
to be lied to first

Is it the living
or always the dead
Death comes back
each night
to offer safe passage
out of this madness
but in the end
takes only those
who don't want to leave
War
News

The sounds of waking

The sound of water boiling for tea

The sounds of speech across the table

The sound of a page being turned

The sound of dishes being washed

The sounds of words rushing to a child's tongue

Now lost without memory

Now only a document of violence
War
News

To live with one foot in the grave is not living. It is waiting.
War
News

Over
and
over
I watch
a sparrow
fall up
into the
sky
The Museum of Collective Punishment has installed on its walls a permanent exhibit of the names and handprints of more than 4,000 children using common red chalk found in any bombed-out elementary school.
War
News

Death will not accept our poems as barter on your behalf.
So we are left trying to write of beauty in a way that will not offend you.
The body of a forest is cut down and fashioned into products to be sold to us.

During a temporary pause in the killing, new trees will be planted again by the surviving children.
I can only conclude that God is afraid of falling into a mass grave without our keening prayers and so stays away from these killing fields until there is a sufficient amount of adoration.
War
News

We have no authority over the moon
except in our poems
but we know that its surface
reflects our violent misery

Which is why I refuse
to slow my words
or cover my eyes
under this blood-filled
harvesting moon
War
News
(for Heba
Abu Nada)

I keep reading
your beautiful poems
each night
in part because
in them
you are still alive
on each closing page
You hold this momentary ceasefire as close as any still breathing child pulled from the rubble of this war.
There are no days left to count without loss. There are only hours of despair that remain in each minute of the next absent future.
The clouds are misshapen with our sorrows and darken as if holding rain instead of our tears.
War
News

We search our nightmares
for signs of life
among those who are forced
to carry their own graves
from place to place
War
News

Now we only see our dreams clearly
because once awake
our lines of sight are blocked
by even more bodies
War
News

Sometimes I am able
to leave the words
that hold me to the page

And then I feel truly free

But now in this time of killing
I want to stay with my words
and offer them to you
as some kind of rough shelter
over the last of your dreams
I am in my funeral suit
and walk the farthest road
singing a dirge for fallen sparrows
that line the path
along the lifting unbalanced sea

I look for you each day
and sometimes find you
on this page waiting for me
in the last breath of your
childhood

I will save the measure of light
that I find in all your poems
because one day
you will need to have all of it back
I cannot stand
the profound
sadness of these
trees
that are
weighted
down
with painful
leaves and
branches

In Gaza
the sidewalk
falls down
behind you

In Gaza
sadness
has replaced
breathing

I turn
the corner
on my street
and glimpse
the confusion
of cars

my country
is filled with
the wreckage
of our lives

And year by year
our sadness
grows heavier
as we near home
The last breath of a child can silence everything except for the terrible sounds of more killing.
I stand in our garden waiting for the small birds that have always carried my sorrow away

But they are now absent in their own sorrow for these same days that will not leave us
The child lay in her bed which was not there any longer and listened to her mother who was not there any longer and

sing a lullaby
War
News

These violent days
do not come alone
with their killing and
bloody mayhem

they come instead
in the company
of other almost
forgotten days

maybe a
birthday party
with so much
laughter

that
someone
fell out
of their
chair

and hurt
themselves
but kept
on laughing
War News

Now all the compass points in Gaza have blood on them.
There must be a way
to sleep and not
rise up to a new grief

There must be a way
of hearing the songs
in our ancient bones
without despair
emptying our hands

There must be a way
to live our lives in freedom
that does not require
the death of anyone's child
I wish that one day
you and your family
could live in a map
of cities that are
still standing

But on this day
I wish that you
and your family
could be lucky

and find
enough food
and water

and sleep
somewhere
that does not
call attention
to your breathing
War
News
(for Rafaat al-Areer)

I cannot translate your dying into any minute within which you are still alive in Gaza

All I can do is write this narrow poem and use it as a kite's tail to steady your journey towards another page filled with beautiful cloth squares of sky
There are still patches of ground where no one has been killed live there until you are told to move

There are still patches of ground where no one has been buried
dig a grave there and climb into it
Poet’s Note

Writing poetry is the means by which I think through both personal and global events. I began writing these poems on October 8, 2023 with the onset of the violence in Gaza and I have written one, sometimes two, each day of this ongoing war. They are, to me, markers of witness, and each one holds my thinking and somatic reaction to this monstrously evil war.

It is also my wish to jolt readers with these poems, to remind them, as well as myself, that we cannot turn away. That our humanity, our collective morality, requires that we bear witness and then take some kind of action. Each morning, when I have no words left to address what is going on, I begin to write. In the end, these poems may be both useless and necessary.
Beau Beausoleil is a poet and activist based in San Francisco, California. His two most recent chapbooks are: *The Killing of George Floyd* (Intermittent Press, 2023) and *Poems for Ukraine* (Barley Books, UK, 2023). He is the founder of *Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here*, a global arts response to the car-bombing of Al-Mutanabbi Street (the street of the booksellers) in Baghdad, Iraq in 2007. It is a project of witness, memory and solidarity with the Iraqi people by poets, artists, and writers.