

text from 'Siege' by John Fuller

I.

The baby wakes.
The baby wakes in the hour of the morning
When the air is cool as silk
And the pale bird of the night gives way
To the crimson bird of the day.
The baby wakes, his fingers at my milk.

I feel the feeling of his fingers,
The tremor of his hands
When he grasps me at the dawning of the day.
He takes his fill, and sleeps again,
But his mouth lingers, taking sips,
And the tongue still moves a little against his lips.

Our land, our land by right of renewal.
The land is a gift. It is our need.
Our hands know the weight of it
As they know the heavy milk of the mother
And the strange memory that lives in the seed.
This is a hope renewed, day after day.
But all that is given may also be taken away.

II.

Where are you going, when you go from me?
Your hand that I held has slipped away.
It looks for pleasure. It looks for trouble.
Something other than work or play.

What are you doing, where I cannot see you?
What enemy have you made
There in the troubled mirror of our land
Where once you worked and played?

You have looked into that mirror of our fear
To find a face staring back at you
Telling you what you hate,
A face that tells you what to do.

The baby wakes.
The baby wakes in the hour of the morning
When the air is full of heat and dust
And the peace of the night gives way
To the crimson beast of the day.

The apartments are sliced open like a dolls' house,
The families in dust, as stiff as dolls,

Children in rubble, unusually still.
In the hospitals, the surgeons in despair,
The beds themselves under rubble,
A thigh stump like a burst pomegranate.

The baby wakes in his mother's blood,
Reaching into space
Where the dying are darkened and whimpering
Like dogs who have been shut out of their lives.

III.

Here is our citadel.
Here is our pride.
But who is inside?

When death is the work of hands,
Anyone may be a murderer or a hero.
Which is it that you claim?

Here is our struggle.
Here is our shame,
When a dead boy
Is nothing but a name.

Here is what our children have done.
Here is the question before the terror.
Here is the explosion before the warning.
Here is the answer, and the gun.

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We lobbed into the citadel
Gifts that unwrapped themselves in smoke,
With bursts of fire like whirling threads.

Our mortars lifted sounds from hell
To deafen the whole air and spell
In dust the sentences they spoke.

And all day long the houses broke.
Night was on fire,

and when we woke

Death was all round us with its smell,
How can it be
That a child is someone's enemy?

Were we outside the citadel?
Were we inside the citadel?
It seemed the same. No one could tell.

IV.

Here is my dead child, who will never wake,
Patrolling the streets with a ready gun,
Waiting with explosives,
Doing what is done with human hands,

Now he is asleep in the hour of the morning
When the air has the bitter smell of death
And the pale bird of the night gives way
To the black bird of the day,
To the heaviness of limbs and the stifling of breath.

Now he is dead, and heavy in my arms.
I feel the final weight of him in my arms,
And not a breath escapes his lips.
What can we do? Where can we go?
The walls are burning, and the locked ships

There is no end to a siege when both sides are besieged.
There is no end to the suffering of each.
There is no end to this, no end
Until the enemy becomes a friend,
And the seed again falls freely to the field.

So here I pray for the need to be revealed,
And the will to answer to the need,
When the voice of mothers will be believed
When the night will in the end give way
To the dawning reason of the day.

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