

Sentinels of Light

By Brandon Marlon

Nitid stars winking across the celestial vault
oversee like sentries a wasteland of asperity
rousting life from its undulating deathscape.
Yet from within the hollows of the dunes
defiant firelight reaches skyward,
steadfast counterparts mirroring illumination
beneath a silver sliver of moon,
keeping faith overnight in the advent of sunburst.

The Shaping Hand

By Brandon Marlon

In our collective nescience
we desperately grope,
constellating desultory tesserae
into a mosaic of understanding,
or minimally a simulacrum
fraught with plausible assumptions.

Impeding this lifelong work-in-progress
are myriad extrinsic forms,
addling and beguiling,
apparently part of a cosmic camarilla
frustrating innocent yearnings
and responsible for the uncertainty
uncharitably acerbating mortal lives.

Guided by logic, we rashly forgo
fanciful conjectures of imagination,
spurning conceits uncushioned
by empirical warrants,
apprehensive of renegade
instincts running contrary to reason.

All the same, each starry night
invites speculation, stirring wonder
as we skim the welkin overhead
for the faintest signs of a polestar
or architectonic seams exposed,
longing to glimpse the hidden dint,
undying and immanent,
the suspected presence behind the absence.

The Cameleer

By Brandon Marlon

We trail the desert veinlet
amid an elongated gorge
of sandstone, rosy and curvaceous,
until at length it depletes into a donga
as it reaches the caravanserai,
dingy and unattended,
a blessed sight for sore eyes.

I dismount to splash and gulp
with cupreous ewer chained to its fount,
then release numb limbs
on mats round glowing logs,
faint, spent, and weary,
dead to the world till moonset.

Before long guttural beasts thrum
disquiet, juddering their jowls
as they ogle stained earth,
sniffing chilly night for the fell scent
of whelps, red in tooth and claw,
gorged with blood and close by.

Fatigue dulls me to overnight howls,
though I slumber with scimitar
gripped, with one eye open,
impatient for servanted hours
when the only packs are those
borne by uniformed hamals,
and the lunar fang has long
withdrawn before daybreak's quirt.

Returnees

By Brandon Marlon

Mournful sounds thrum
over the parched boneyard,
claustal and forsaken;
unseasonable winds swerve and bluster
amid its doleful marrow salting the earth.

Once the sunlet plunges
under brittle, ecru soil,
sullied ossatures abruptly rattle,
gasping pure breath,
vying for lifeblood, jostling for sinews,
whirling to discard the claggy grime
of barren ages rooted in wilderness.

Dawn greets the straying host
lost and bewildered in gratitude's rapture,
squinting in the light,
admiring the vista dotted with townlets
as a spate of praise spumes from their maws.

Some revenants emerge and roam unsmeared;
others limp from the clay of estranging strata.

Courtyard Fountain

By Brandon Marlon

As sand drifts into dunes,
we wend along the tortuous
course in lockstep with the daystar,
our gullets torrid, our grume curdling,
hinting at careless scrapes,
announcing our bone-weariness
to the wheeling birds of prey
we pretend not to notice
while we push-push-push onward,
ovened by the overhead orb,
remorseless and deaf to appeal.

Ghoul-like, we lurch bedraggled
into a spavined maidan,
greeted by pitiless glares,
surrounded by the self-absorbed
bustle of canopied hawkers and mongers
garbed in turban, tarboosh, and burnoose,
wheedling and wangling in fulfillment
of their richly deserved reputations.

In the umbra ahead a pensive caid
pores over a fatwa from Al-Azhar;
beside us mules moisten in slough
and creeping crocodiles vie for gristle
to satisfy the capacity of their maws.

From a distance a stocky innkeeper
beckons us into his midst,
cogently gesturing toward
ablutions and libations,
to the inviting environs of a spouting pool,
for sore eyes and sapped limbs
the finest offer this side of heaven.

Writing Raw

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Brandon Marlon bio: Brandon Marlon is a writer from Ottawa, Canada. He received his B.A. (Hon.) in Drama and English from the University of Toronto and his M.A. in English from the University of Victoria. His poetry has been published variously in Canada, the U.S., England, Greece, Romania, Israel, and India. www.brandonmarlon.com.