

The Cedars of Lebanon

Robert A. Rees

There is nothing in Lebanon.
We are playing in our own blood.
—A Maronite monk (1988)

Across a shattered street, a Muslim groom lifts
the train of his Christian bride as he steps over
broken glass, old tires, and miles of rubblestone.
Her face, a dark rose, is the only beauty
in this ravaged landscape.

The guns are silent for this small repose, although Mars
waits greedily for those born to murder one another
for reasons no one will remember.

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Here Phoenicians made their alphabet
for lovers to speak their marriage vows and death be
called by its endless names. At nearby Cana
Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast of friends.

Today there are no miracles, just these two figures
in white, like fugitive angels fleeing the world.

Each spring the waters of the Adonis flow out
of limestone caverns deep in the heart
of Mount Lebanon. As they descend
through rust hills, the waters turn red, flowing,
as the old story goes, from wounds torn
in the flesh of the beautiful youth by Ares
disguised as a wild boar.

Wild pigs and dogs rout in rubble even on this day.

Even on this day, when Adonis blossoms adorn
the wedding bed and where, when night shrouds the war,
Christ and Mohammed will make peace,

Venus holds her dying love in her arms as her tears
speed the crimson river to the sea.