

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

After the Party

by Steve Brown

After the party – as I was contracted – I arrived
to do the clean-up. More than promptly. I had waited
out the hours sat on the low hill overlooking.
We glimpse such lives: I had heard
all their strange music, as free as streams,
then the sharp ring of gilded cups, the rising noise
of wine-soaked boasts and jokes and imprecations;
the soft thrum of arrows, noisy encouragements,
noisier disappointments. Then, a silence.
Then arrows and axes, cutting. Screams.
And then, a deeper silence – as though a breath was held
over the world, had stilled the motion, moment,
of the globe, was carving this into stone memory.

I entered the great hall alone – the other cleaners fled –
finding the great hall doors swung open for scavenging dogs:
some candles guttering, a noiselessness,
no movement. Spilt wine, of course, split chairs
- and bodies, bristled with a throng of arrows,

strange progeny of hedgehog, heron. I moved as quietly
as if finding myself in someone else's dream.

All was as under sea: bodies as polyps, clung to tables,
splayed in inhuman shapes. No sound. No sound,
but the rolling of a cup – and one faint exhalation
of a soul released. Then, in the background,
one urgent whispered conversation: something as urgent,
arrow-driven, as love released.

This was no place for me. I considered sitting on the throne,
stifled a self-horrified laugh. I know only of goats,
their keeping, the slaughtering of pigs. I picked up gold
- the cups, the bracelets – as though it would burn.
I retraced my steps, walking backwards. I gave thanks
that I am too small for stars to notice,
have no Fate writ anywhere, have no name. That night
I lay cradled into hillside; the soft dark night
replayed the music I had heard. I had seen
the cold lessons of hard gold: its terror, beauty.
Tomorrow I would seek a position somewhere towards Corinth.
I had learnt too much.