

Étoile de Sang / Star of Blood

Madeleine Riffaud

Translation by
Stephanie Cox

Étoile de Sang

A Ch. Martini mon comrade dit Picpus

Deux. Trois étoiles dans le ciel.

Deux. Trois étoiles dans la Seine.

Étoile qui brûle en tremblant

—O notre peine!—

Trois étoiles de sang

Sont là sur les draps blancs.

O notre frère blessé à mort

Peut-être bien que, toi, tu dors...

Et c'est pourtant ta nuit dernière

—Toute dernière—

Trois étoiles de sang

S'élargissant, sur les draps blancs.

Est-ce bien toi?... (Ou est-ce moi?)

Qui fut blessé? Trou dans le ventre—

Sueurs de la mort... Trou dans mon coeur!

Nos deux douleurs:

Deux étoiles de sang

L'une dans l'autre se fondant.

Oh la lumière fait très mal!
Et tout ce blanc aux draps, aux murs...

L'odeur d'éther des pansements

—Étouffement.—

Trois étoiles de sang
Implacablement au drap blanc.

“—Mais, le pauvre homme, il va mourir!”

La salle d'attente, elle est ici.

On y attend depuis longtemps

—On y attend—

La fin, la grande Fin
Par le train du matin...

Dehors, la rue, la guérilla

En retour de flammes, en retours

Meurtriers. Jets d'eau jaillissants

Où nous avons bu.

Étoiles en fleurs là-haut dans le ciel

Étoiles vertes aux yeux des chats.

...Nous préparons une autre nuit

Saignant avec toi, notre frère.

La grande nuit de la vengeance

—De la naissance!—

Étoiles de feu, étoiles de sang

Étoiles nouvelles plein le firmament!—

(21 juillet 1944)

Star of Blood

for Ch. Martini, my comrade known as Picpus

Two. Three stars in the sky.

Two. Three stars in the Seine.

Stars who burn into trembling

—Oh our sorrow!—

Three stars of blood

there on the white sheets.

Oh our brother wounded to death

Although perhaps you merely sleep...

It is, nevertheless, your last night

—the very last—

Three stars of blood

are spreading through the white sheets.

Is it you? ... (Or is it me?)

Who was wounded? A hole in the belly—

Sweats of death...A hole in my heart!

Our two griefs:

Two stars of blood

The one found herself in the other.

O the harsh light!
And all those white sheets, white walls...
The stench of ether and bandages
—It's suffocating—
Three stars of blood
Implacable on the white sheet.

She is here in the waiting room.
"But the poor man, he's going to die!"
We have been waiting a long time
— We are waiting for it —
the end, a great End
through this speeding morning...

Outside, on the street, the guerilla
against the flames, against the
murderers. Jets of water gush
where we drank.
Stars bloom like flowers in the sky.
Stars glow green like cats' eyes.

... We are preparing another night
of bleeding with you, our brother.
The grand night of vengeance
—of rebirth!—
Stars of fire, stars of blood.
Stars to fill the heavens!

(July 21, 1944)

Madeleine Riffaud was 18 years-old when she joined a communist cell affiliated with the French Resistance. She took the nom de guerre of Rainer in honor of Rilke, whom she admired. She served as a messenger and a combatant. Riffaud was arrested, imprisoned, tortured, sentenced to be executed, released in a prisoner exchange, and returned to the fight in Paris days before its liberation. After the war, her poetry was published as a collection entitled *Le Poing Fermé*. Riffaud went on to a career as a war correspondent, serving in Algeria and in North Viet Nam. She currently lives in Paris.

Stephanie Cox teaches writing at Boise State University in Idaho. She teaches courses in nonfiction writing, foundational studies, and first-year writing. Her specialties and interests include online pedagogy, collaborative learning, creative nonfiction, and international education through the University Studies Abroad Consortium.