Ten paces from this doorway
a hollow of stone
not so much shelter
as a wall against which
to flatten my back
continue to count
a breath of a pause, six round burst
two second hold, one
single crack
and twenty more paces
from this wall to his body,
his body to doorway, my back
to that wall.

Emergency Condition Responses

Code Green: cut hand, scrape, broken arm, nausea, and headache.

Code Yellow: decreased level of consciousness, chest pain, unconsciousness for unknown reason, loss of feeling/motor skills in an extremity.

Code Red: penetrating trauma to the torso, severe loss of blood, severe head injury, and chest pain followed by unconsciousness.

Code Blue: no breathing/no heartbeat.

Code Black: Rigor mortis, Post mortem lividity, decapitation, decomposition, etc.

Flash
a body reduced to beads of glass
fused in sand at the blast point's edge.

Filigree
the lace of an exposed cheek
over tooth and jaw;
impossibly white.

Pause
the space between light
and the rush of sound that crushes breath
from Kevlar and rib;
a moment of clarity
before the market erupts, before
the Humvee pitches, then drops to its side.

Afterimage
a thickening of scar tissue, the absence
of expression, of an eardrum, of an iris.

How do you move 1,000 pounds of concrete,
separate bodies from debris,
twisted as steel bar
at the exposed edge of a wound;
in the expanse of aftermath, broken pieces
a uniform shade of red,
how do you know your own;
how do you reconcile
the hand held is no longer attached, phantom pain
is the body missing limb, not the reverse;
that you still wake in your clothing
between adrenaline and exhaustion,
that the year begins as it ended, will end
as it began?

It begins with a photograph and a rug; that so much can be woven
into both, one in dyed wool, the other scar tissue against the undisturbed
surface of her hand. It's in her eyes. I know it's cliché but look, there is
something there—unsaid. Resignation, resolve, or just "God damn it,
we've planned this since high school, you will not take this away from
me too." She is in white, he a dress uniform, three-quarter view. The eye
facing the camera is glass—impenetrable.

The rug is tribal, meant for prayer. It is one of the few things I kept.
They say the weaving of bombs into its borders, machine guns and tanks
began during the Russian occupation; now the images are of planes en route,
buildings on fire, the flag—American.

Poet Francesco Levato is the author of Marginal State and creates poetry-based video artwork. He is the executive director of the Poetry Center in Chicago. The work here is excerpted from a longer poem.