

Curfew

After the Baltimore riots, April 27, 2015

From the Old French, *covrefeu*, literally, [it] covers
[the] fire. See *cover*. See *fire*. Hear the church bell
toll the hour to cover the hearth fire with ashes
to prevent conflagrations from untended fires.
His eyelids swollen shut; the police van a sealed casket.
The lids of ten thousand prescriptions, empty pill-bottle
shells looted from pharmacies under flickering streetlight.
See what burned under the cover of night, what simmered
under the cover-up. See smoke signals rise at sky's edge.
Spell it with a blanket that covers and uncovers. Spell
conflagration. Write *the destructive burning of a building,*
town, or forest in blood-soot across the underbellies of ten
thousand vacant clouds. Spell *mayday*, that muscle-sear
of rage. Spell *justice*, that bitter ache. Hear sirens long
into the dark hours, then the odd quiet of empty streets.
Taste the legacy of corpses in the embers glowing at dawn.

Matt Hohner

First place, 2016 *Oberon Poetry Prize* and published in *Oberon Poetry Magazine 2016*; shortlisted, *Fish Poetry Prize* 2016. From *Thresholds and Other Poems* (Apprentice House 2018).

Saratoga Passage, August 2014

Whidbey Island, Puget Sound

Up late, I watch the Perseids etch their brief furies through high, cold, moonlit air. My wife of eleven years, partner of twenty-one, sleeps in the room behind me. Three stories down, the salt tide slides away from concrete bulwarks, slips quietly back into itself: the air's fragrance leavens with life and decay as twelve hours of water give way to rocks maned with kelp, sand rivulets emptying under carcasses of hundred-year-old driftwood, and the distinct whiff of an uneaten fish, speared by talons and dropped, bottom-sunk until now. In two days I will be forty-three. I know nothing of my birth, hold no narrative of my making, nothing of the weather that day, what you wore, who drove you to the hospital. Above, particles ricochet in skips and scratches through the dark emptiness between stars. I must have been like these: a brief interrupter of cycles, growing for nine moons, released out of you and away into space, gone but for an umbilical scar, fading into the sea of darkness and memory, covered by the rhythm of tides, washed by time into something smooth you carry, but cannot touch. A loon at the bend trills across glassy currents; sound of wingtips in flight touching calm water. The soft heartbeat of waves lapping the receding tideline grows fainter as the frozen cosmos delivers hot specks into fleet fire. I listen as ocean and moon sway their eternal slow dance, one drawing the other closer, then releasing. I have known this pulling-to and letting go, the profound momentary ripples, the desolate stillness that follows. I have known the searing white heat of entry into this world alone.

Matt Hohner

Shortlisted for *The Moth* International Poetry Prize 2015, published in *The Moth*, Issue 20, Spring 2015 and *The Irish Times*, Friday, April 24, 2015; winner, 2015 *Lascaux* Prize in Poetry. From *Thresholds and Other Poems* (Apprentice House 2018).

How to Unpack a Bomb Vest

Start with the vest itself, each pocket stuffed with scriptures and explosives, hatred and nails, belief and batteries. No. Start with prayer on Friday, or Saturday, or Sunday. No. Search online for where the materials and the rhetoric were bought. No. It's at the hardware store, the mosque, the chatroom. Begin with an olive tree, a way of life, a desert sky. First, learn a language spoken for thousands of years. Learn its words for forgiveness, for war, for love. Learn every word for revenge spoken by anyone who has seen a drone. It is scrawled in the concrete dust of Aleppo, in pockmarks across the walls of Baghdad. The source bubbles up from the ground, black, thick, pungent. Start with the forests of dinosaurs. No. Start with the treasures of the west. Look in your gas tanks for the instructions on demilitarizing sleeveless tops. Drink the poetry of nomads and scholars for a taste of old bloodlines and darkness. Walk the back alleys of grievance in the shadows of pyramids. Cover yourself with hijab and begin with apology. It is there, in worn carpets and stained coffee cups, in bombed out hospital wards and torture cells. Dig a hole six millennia down through generations of soldiers' bones and sacrifices to God, deep in the cool earth between two ancient rivers, and get in it. This is where you will find the directions for grace written in carbon, written in breath, written in songs whose lyrics the dead have long since forgotten.

Matt Hohner

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