

New Poetry by Shawn McCann: “All I Can Do Is Watch” and “No Way To Fight Back”



DONE WITH MOONS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

All I Can Do Is Watch

It's 0400
on a bridge crossing over
the Tigris River.
Qayyarah is a town along its fertile banks,
15,000 people call it home.
I wonder how long it has been here,
how many times conquered
and rebuilt.

On the outskirts lies an oil field,
it's where I live.
The wooden walls
of this makeshift bunker

in the sand
wouldn't stop an attack,
just slow it down.

Surrounded by blackness,
my mind wanders valleys of homesickness,
forced to breathe toxic air,
flanked by those who want to kill
my invasive body, parade it
through the streets.

A bright light hits the oil field,
shakes the ground.
Movement on the hill to the north—
I call it in.

Orange flames rise in oxygen,
twirl in mirthful celebration,
the smoke swirling higher,
my life forever changed and
all I can do is watch.

No Way to Fight Back

I can smell the exhaust from
the plane that's taking me home.

Standing in line to board the whale,
maw open wide to let us inside.

Air forming breath in the illumine,
I'm done with moons in this hemisphere.

These stars, still foreign to me.
Even at the end, I know I don't belong

in a land of sharp sand, the broken
glass bowl of democracy.

This land won't let me leave, though.
Raining metal explodes my dreams of home;

swarming red flames engulf
the surrounding canvas. The sound

catches the light, knocks me flat
to the ground as alarms blare attack,

bullets ricochet off cold slabs.
And just like that, I'm crouched inside,

cold-cocked by the reality of
no way to fight back.