

New Poetry by Matt Eidson: “Corridors” and “The Dogs of War”



IN THE CORRIDORS / image by
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Corridors

It's this hallway. It reminds me
things will never be the same. I feel
sand coat the inside of my nose and
bullet casings burn my neck. I smell
the sweat and week-old shower as
Habibi stares
from the side of the road. I hear rocks ping the MRAP
and kids laughing
as they run and hide. I feel my lungs tense
and watch the black cloud spiral
into the air. I smell the oil and dust
of the MRAP bleeding
on the side of the road. There are soldiers
kicking in doors and dragging out
mothers and children. They are people
making peace with
their God.

I see him
in the narrow barracks. A farmer's tan and tighty-whities,
he snorts and I try not to laugh. He lays next to me
under the bunks with his arms around me
and his teasing breath in my ear. We wrestle
against the pavement as
Sunday slips by.

Now he lays on a dirt path between mud huts. He's slipping away and I wonder if he knows it. He's bleeding but too weak to cover the wound. A Corpsman calls to him from cover and tells him to hang on. Rounds fly overhead

and Marines hold Doc back.

What did he think about?

Did he imagine his family back in Texas?

Did he wonder why he volunteered for the deployment?

Did he feel the pavement against his back as I struggled to break free?

His memory weighs me down. I trudge through the corridors of my university and see his face in other students. He lays in the hallways and bleeds through his flak jacket, imagining his family back in Texas. He's crying because he knows he's close. I lay next to him after everyone's left and the sun has set. I wrap my arms around him and remind him we still need to visit the water park back home; we still need to eat Whataburger; we still need to visit his high school football stadium.

When I wake up, I'm alone in the hallway, the pavement cradling me like he once did. Side-by-side, we let the weeks pass now. It's better when we're alone, because I can tell him how scared I am. He wasn't perfect and neither am I. But I'm still here and I'm afraid I can't be enough for him or my wife or my son or my sister or you. I push myself up and feel the sand inside my nose and realize that dying isn't hard, and killing the other is just

making the choice to live. What's hard is
having no idea what it will mean
in the corridors you'll occupy.

Dogs of War

We used to cup our hands and yell
come here boy as you brought back whatever
you'd dug up. We walked the trails
behind our homes or the streets snaking the neighborhood,
lined with garbage
cans for the morning pick-up. And you, barking at
strangers eyeing from backyards
as we'd walk aimless, unable to see
beyond the horizon, or even
think about war.

Rifles slung, we clap our hands against our legs and
imagine life without them. Habibi eyes
our column as it splits the street. Everyone
has a cell phone, but his has a death wish. Boyhood assures us
the sutured dog carcass isn't an IED, experience tells us
otherwise.

His body lies along the roadside
lined with trash
no one picks up.

We once roamed the base at night and
shot the strays. We found a box of puppies,
picked them up and named them.
Then we took them
to the burn pit
and threw them into the fire,
tossing aluminum fencing
on top
as they yelped. We stood there

with our rifles slung and tried to feel
the sorrow of death
or what it was like
to be home and in love.

We didn't choose to be this way, or we did,
but we didn't know
this is the way we'd be. We still hear the howls.
And when we wake up sweating, we forget
we're not kids anymore. It reminds us
that war happened, and he died.
Now we're home
and you don't understand as you sit
on the other side
of the room and wonder
when's the next time we'll go dig something up.

All in good time, boy. All in good time.