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POETRY | FALL 2018

## Oxygen

By Hollis Kurman

A machine detecting dye, the parry  
padding into the room where he lies,  
wordless, feet stilled and arms bound.  
His glasses have been removed,  
his pockets emptied. A life fills

those pockets, the tokens and coins,  
addresses and appointments. Cash, still.  
Hints of barter expired. I clutch his coat  
and dapper hat in my lap, breathing in  
deeply, as he cannot, to record his scent.

The apartment chokes on his clutter  
and unfinished, unopened, unpaid.  
Beyond his windows the not yet sun,  
bouncing upward from building angles.  
We pace, sit, wait. Television grates.

From the doorway I see only  
sheets and blankets in tangle;  
a rise too small to describe  
a man. How many hours ago  
had the coughing commenced?

The whoosh of car tires in the rain white  
noises our sleep. For one slow moment  
the high floor nights return, doormen guarding  
our years-of-taking-things-for-granted, so sure  
we had a right to that address, to one another.

He was a perfect tweed, a dimpled felt hat,  
not yet visored souvenir nor hospital cap.  
Lonely yet stately at home, his pride in saving  
lives. The city would greet him, “Ah, Doctor,”  
not yet tempted to take his elbow or to cry.

When the phone call comes, crumple  
and break. Wait, we’ve not yet  
spoken today; wait, take *my* oxygen;  
wait, the policemen called you “sir” in the  
middle of the night, carrying you back to bed.

Wait.

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**Hollis Kurman is contributing Editor on the Board of Barrow Street Books in NYC. Her poems (one of which was nominated for a Pushcart Prize) have been published in multiple journals, including Barrow Street, Rattle, Phoebe, the Ocean State Review, and VIA (Voices in Italian Americana), and are forthcoming in AMS (Cipher Literary Magazine). Kurman also writes poems and stories for children. Her debut picture book, *Welcome 1! A Counting Book of Kindnesses* (the refugee child’s journey through the lens of help offered along the way) will be published in 2020 by Otter Barry Books (UK) with an endorsement by Amnesty International. The writer, who lives in Amsterdam, has studied poetry with Sharon Olds and Daniel Hoffman.**