

All Tucked In

When I was five, I always slept
with the bedcovers pulled up tight
against my chin. I prayed
that vampires wouldn't suck blood
through the tasteless threads
of a quilt and that the sharp-clawed monster
waiting behind my bedroom door
for "lights out" couldn't snap
through sheets that smelled
of the perfume of my mother's hands.

At fifteen, I pulled the cotton covers closer
to hide myself from the nuclear holocaust
that might mushroom under the moon,
melting my eyes into the hollows of my skull
like two pats of butter thrown
on a hot skillet. The sheets would shield
me from the firestorm,
leaving me alive
to brave a blizzard
of quiet fallout.

Now, at twenty-three, the sheets still skirt
my neck at night. I cannot explain
why the soft fabric feels
like armor during the witching
hours; I simply understand,
deep in my bones,
that we call a bed's blanket *comforter*
because it wards off the jagged shapes that snarl
in the dead of the fallen darkness.

—Trenton L. Hickman