

Veterans Day

by Hugh Findlay

On the first day, I saw the smoking fog deploy
its argument deeply into the skeletal trees,
injecting its slow flood into leaves, surrounding and
invading the sinew of cellulose bloodstreams.
I heard its infectious discussion whispering
submission into the defenseless forest.

O father, soldier, sage, mentor,
you sparred with the business of dying, slowly
planning your retreat, your strategy as if art.
Saying "*See, this is how a man dies.*"

On the second day, weary branches sagged,
surrendering to the weight of their wounds.
Earth softened around foundations of root,
the many legs bleeding into sand, stone and dirt,
until the tilt of arms bent to the dropspots of
their Spring seedlings, smothered, confused,
losing all resolve.

Some father, teacher of chess, boxing, benediction.
On 9/11, I cried the only time as a man
and you responded "*Life giveth and taketh away.*"
My wife gave me a son nine months later.

On the third day came a withering assault
of cold rain and overnight freeze.
At dawn the first tree obeyed gravity, collapsing
into the arms of two more, the right and left flanks
splintering clean, bark flying like shrapnel.
And then like a cannon, twenty feet
of treetop snapped, exploding and leaping tree to tree,
decapitated trunks recoiling under loss of limb.

Dear father, you balanced as I pulled up
your diaper, me trying desperately not to look.
After a lifetime of pause, you sighed "*You're a good son.*"
In your eyes, eternal forgiveness.

Unquelled, the dark assault advanced all morning.
Strictures of ice crawled like tumors along
pathways of ruptured limbs,
numbed in pain, groaning and
finally shrieking defiance as they
fell like broken bones to the forest floor.

My father, warrior, legend, hero,
you came to me in a dream
and said only "*I am home.*"
Your last stand, a final peace.

Come nightfall, a gentle wave of
snowflake softly buried the forest.
Mute, retreating, camouflaged victory.

Hugh Findlay's writing and photography have been published worldwide. He is in the third trimester of life and is working on a book of "photopoetry," similar to the Japanese Haiga. Instagram: @hughmanfindlay