

Firefly Magazine

V



A Journal of Luminous Writing



Waiting for Daylight | Judy Wood

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POETRY



The Reader | Kyle Hemmings



Featured Poem

OH, CROWS | *Tom Montag*

What we want of you
is wisdom. What

you show us is
bird magic and card

tricks and raucous
dancing on the green

lawn of the grey house
at the end of the road.

HIERATIC 4 | *Julia Rose Lewis*

Metaphor is the tree, the vehicle to the tiger orchid tenor. Air plants, orchids are a high erratic plant, an epiphyte. Epiphytes go in the cracks of their host trees, where the compost falls and collects. They grow out of organic debris: trace the minerals lost, leaves shaped like haiku, pull the moisture away. The compost pile is a blooming buzzing profusion. The roots of orchids are highly specialized. Their old and dead epidermis cells are called the velamen, in part spongy and fibrous bodies. So the silver, white, or brown roots take inside the humidity; beauty is an emergent property. Gods are in the eye of the beholder. Eye of the stem, node, undeveloped bud is the beginning of growth again. The tree is the god of the tiger orchid. The growth pattern of the tree is the same as the human nervous system. Life history: I flower you.

HOOK | *Lindsay McLeod*

I should
never have trusted
in my ridiculous self,
because the day came,
when the sound
of your name,
caused an
altogether different
catch in my heart.

Once, 2 black holes
succumbed
to the unstoppable pull
of their own mass
circling like lovers
rounding for eons
before collapsing
into one.

What Einstein knew
is that bodies
of such mass
cannot come together
without consequence—

that there is a warping
a violence to time
and to space
in the consummation,
releasing the energy
of every star
in the cosmos
as a wave
of gravity itself
sent, rippling, across
the fabric of the universe

but slowly
fading also
until reaching us
millions of galaxies
and one billion
years later as a wave
so minute it required
1,000 scientists
pressing their ears
to an antennae
of pure vacuums
lasers and precision optics
two miles long
to hear
the tiniest, little
ping.

What Einstein knew
has been my experience, too.

We, these bodies
of heft and light,
we rarely fuse together
or pull apart
without consequence
without some violence
to time and space

though the wave
may dissipate

across miles and years
be hard to detect
with the grossness
of our usual optics
and interference
to our antennae

too often
I am at the mercy yet
of the long ago
the whispered signals
the things not said

I am stretched
by the hidden waves

the ripples of ancient
collisions shake me still

THE COTTONWOODS | *Tom Montag*

Not that the cottonwoods
can keep their thoughts to themselves.

They must speak of the creek,
of wind, and sometimes of rain.

We are used to their clatter
but don't know what it means.

They might be arguing with God.

LIGHTNING | *John L. Stanizzi*

It is garish
when the immense avenue
of the sky
comes to life
under lightning's cheap neon
and we are tiny and poor
wide-eyed beneath our blankets
when thunder tumbles its enormous dice
and for the briefest moment
we are fooled into believing
that like us
the black trees
have thrown open their arms
to the wind

THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE | *Michael Minassian*

1. to write a poem
2. time moves backwards and forward at the same speed
3. in any order you choose
4. breaking rules, breaking habits, breaking hearts
5. in the random abstraction of verse
6. comets are ice not fire
7. inspiration comes in spurts or not at all
8. rearrange the lines on the page
9. words are only words
10. hang what meaning on them that you like
11. the opposite of big bang is big crunch
12. what are the other lights behind God's eye?
- 13.

Silas tripped on his words
at dinner
and time forgot how to breathe.

Grandmother said that the man
Mother read to late evenings
was our long lost Uncle Charlie,
and he had gone out to rest.

Mother walked nights after that
with her hair loose
until the first flooding,
and we all came to know
the scrape of her greater loss
when the fire came later.

When father returned it changed again,
but Uncle Charlie never quit resting.

Silas told me years later
that the police found him in the river,
a bullet through his back,
his reading eyes cut away
carefully by scissors.

I didn't cry or mourn,
since we weren't really relatives,
though family had a way
of being who you read with
when the nights were long.

ASCENDING | *Ryan Warren*

Closely, look closely
and you will find her

hovering in the air
somewhere between

as I do, each night
easing her gently

back down into her tucked bed
careful, careful now

for she is a bit fragile
as floating people are

arisen from piggy-backs
training wheels

from wide-eyed wonder
yet not fully ascended

into pimples and crushes
the receding into one's own

only the first tiny signs
nights of nameless tears

easy, easy now
still, she sleeps with rag dolls

gentle, gentle now
she also rolls her eyes

can you see her hovering
one arm in both worlds

can you feel her holding
back from the rise

it's what my heart wants, of course
even as I gently loosen her grip

now I better understand the fog
rising from a morning field

now my heart is filled with love
for the wave crashing on a rocky shore

THE "THEY DON'T SELL ANGEL JERKY AT THE 7-11" BLUES | *Michael Minassian*

Angel wings are mostly
feather, bone, & cartilage
not to mention bits of cloud
& wind
 – celestial gristle –
nothing to chew
or gnaw when you're
 driving
 down
 the road.

MYSTERY MAN | *Ed Ahern*

Listen closely to a woman
and she'll tell you who she is.
Listen closely to a man
and he'll tell you who he pretends to be.
A man plays a game of I hide, don't seek
and plays it well.
His script is memorized.
and reassuring.
Banalities to associates
and excuses without fault.
But a man does not deceive himself
and will tell his mutilated truths.
But only to another man
and only if greatly threatened.
Women rarely touch
the buried in their men.

HOW I BECAME | *Jennifer Lothrigel*

I remember
the hands of ancient grandmothers
lacing my DNA together
one strand at time,
the way their silvery hair fell across
their timeless eyes,
how they sang all night
with heavy breath between words
spinning infinite threads of wisdom
harmoniously in utero
I became earth—
suckling the milk of the deep night sky.

HOW SAD, THOUGHT MY DOG | *Ryan Warren*

How sad, thought my Dog,
is the life of that mayfly.
No time, in only a single day,
to invest an entire afternoon
in the sunny spot at the foot of the stairs.

How poignant, I thought,
is my dog's life. How static
are his passages. How limited
is his ability, in only 15 years,
to experience the sweep of the world.

How touching, thought the Mountain,
is that human's life, whose body withers
in less than 100 years and can never know
the magnificent upward folding of the earth,
and the soft rounding of the rain and the trees.

How piteous, thought the Earth,
is that mountain's life, worn to dust
in only 500 million years, rooted always
under the same skies, unable to feel the thrust
of gravity pulling us through the universe.

How quaint, thought the Universe,
is the life of the Earth, merely 4 billion years
and consigned never to experience the wonder

of polychromatic gas clouds ten galaxies wide,
towering nebulae, slowly gestating new stars.

How heart-breaking, thought God,
is the life of that Universe, only 14 billion years
and believing in the eternal expansion of its own
wonder. Unable to see so many other universes
bubbling around it, each bursting in due time.

How sad, thought the Mayfly,
is the life of God, to design an entire universe
just for mayflies, the flawlessly timed stages of life,
the delicate rebirth of every molt, and yet be forced
to endure beyond the simple perfection of a single day.



HIAKUS ON A LATE JANUARY MORNING | *Oban West*

Grey stone unyielding.

Wind whispers across the trees.

Soft edges now green.

Angel falls from grace,

Cry not, for only from earth

Can he see the stars.

Green flora is life,

Until it falls to the dirt.

Soon to be brown too.

He smiles at death

For only through the shed blood

Will carnivores eat.

FLASH FICTION



Traffic Jamming | *Kyle Hemmings*



Featured Flash

MEMENTO MORI | *Ron Gibson, Jr.*

My dad turned to me, grown, and asked, over the radio's steel voice, "Do you remember?"

Remember? Where do I begin to remember? I remember the sickly gleam of black ice on a bend of road near Mount Vernon. I remember the sudden flapping wings of a quail at my feet leaving my heart beating as fast as it flapped away. I remember the pungent smell of Old Spice when grandpa hugged me into his neck. I remember many things. Things I'd rather not remember. And things that make me long for the past. That I ache ... I remember that ache.

His hand gripped the wheel with confident ease guiding us smoothly down the Alaskan Way Viaduct. My eyes pled with the surroundings for a clue only to be answered with cryptic flashes of afternoon sunlight reflecting off the city's mirrored panes and the bruised body of Elliot Bay where a parasailor floated away from the waves, edging towards the sun like a lassoed Icarus.

My dad looked from the road to me again as if to say, Well, do you remember?

I said, "No." Our conversation seemed disjointed, as had most of our conversations since I'd reached the age of man.

He sighed. A sigh usually followed by "Shit," a word he often used to express himself. Ranging from his aw-shucks "Shit," said with a warm smile after a good anecdote, joke, or interesting factoid, to the seemingly unconscious "Shit" he'd repeat over and over, like a vulgar mantra, as he performed a task, to the insane

bursts of fatherly anger when spit would fly from his contorted mouth with a venomous "shhhh..." before the thunderously compact "...it" that sent tremors through my childhood... But this time his sigh, thankfully, remained only a wearisome sigh.

"Turn it up," my mother ordered from the backseat.

I reached for the serrated knob and with a twist turned up the radio. The Beatles' The Long and Winding Road drained out, softly swarming within the car. I remembered sitting Indian-style on long-haired, puke-green carpet with oversized headphones on, listening to that song spinning out from under the phonograph needle into my ears as my mother coated the air with swirling plumes of Kent 100's smoke, feet kicked up in a plush orange recliner, watching Donahue.

"You'll remember," my dad assured me in a flat tone.

I looked away to my right -- the familiarity of the city intoning like weather-worn lines of poetry as deeply rooted within me as my very own heartbeat. I spotted an open window on the top floor of the Pike Place Market, a window I had once stared out, fascinated by the city's delicate swarm and the shades of Elliot Bay under dreary October skies, while eating lunch with friends at the Athenian SeaFood Restaurant.

I pointed to the window and said, "That's where Janet, Sylvia, her little boy Royce, and I ate."

My brother Will responded from behind me with an uninterested, "Hmm."

"The one with the big tits?" my dad asked, referring to Janet.

I answered by rolling my window down a turn, letting the rushing hum of moving pavement mix with the horn and string accompaniment on the radio.

"A long long time agooo-ooo," my mother's slightly soured, soprano voice overlayed Paul McCartney's.

The viaduct bent to the right, my dad's column of knuckles easing along the curve with a gentleness he was unable to share with me, or I with him. The Battery Street Tunnel loomed into view. We neared the lip of its entrance when, without forewarning, my dad counted down, "Three...two... one," sucking in

a lungful of air and holding it. I realized I had unconsciously followed his lead, holding my breath alongside him as we drove on, entering through a gate of light into darkness.

"You left me standing there," my mother crooned.

"What are they doing?" Will asked her. But she continued singing, his words falling wilted on the vinyl backseat.

My dad and I faced forward watching the black pavement unfurl around each bend revealing in that tunnel twilight only more shrouded pavement ahead. We glanced at one another, checking to see if either of us was cheating, with thin, silent breaths.

The airless darkness between us evoked a childhood memory of when I entered my parents bedroom, lights off, and they told me to go away. Instead, I closed the door, pretending that I had left, and quietly laid down on a pile of clothing on the floor, holding my breath, trying not to laugh aloud. Moments passed, the bed's covers rustled above, and I laughed, unable to contain my innocent secret any longer. My dad yelled ferociously, "Get the fuck out of here!" I opened the door, confused and frightened, and dashed to my bedroom to hide.

"Lead me to your dooorrrr," my mother continued.

My dad's right hand began moving in a circular, hurry-up motion, as if summoning the tunnel's end. My lungs tightened and burned, the body's impulse to breathe surging with need.

I envisioned the tunnel as a womb. The car, a steel sack of amniotic fluid incubating us. Our held breath, anticipation of that final contraction of concrete muscles pushing us forward. I held the door handle. My dad's hurry-up rotations quickened. The edge of light neared. Its illuminated lip, freedom. Our wheels pushed on and passed out of darkness into a splash of light. We released a long gush of air and laughed.

"I forgot all about that," I said.

"Forgot what?" Will asked, head peeking forward between our shoulders.

"Why were you guys holding your breath?"

"We used to always do that when driving through a tunnel," I tried to explain.

"Why though?" Will persisted.

"Tradition," my dad said, looking at me with a slight smile.

"Yeah yeah yeahhhh," my mother ended her song.

I looked to him as he drove on through this puddle of light pooled between the dark shores of eternities, watching his smile that hid every word, and I thought, I remember you.

GAZEBO SONG | *Jacqueline Brown*

I.

The answer was so obvious, but still they would ask. "He's going to come this time, right?" The answer was always no.

II.

The conversation seemed rote. "How was the show, sweetheart?" "Fine fine fine," came the reply, answered at hummingbird speed, fueled by theatrically related endorphins. While the question was posed with an airy cheerfulness, it was tinged with an edge of disappointment, which was quickly ignored. Acknowledging the why of it all was not important.

III.

"I think he's here!" "No, he's not! That's ridiculous! He can't be!"

There was an agreement, and yet there he was, trying unsuccessfully to hide behind his program, embarrassed at being caught. It was supposed to be an end of show surprise, as it was the last show before self-imposed theatrical retirement. It ended up as the mid show dictionary definition of surprise.

IV.

There were typical last show events and behaviors: the mad rush of making sure to see everyone, the accepting of flowers and praise, the conversations that

seemed to be had in voices an octave higher than usual as no one knew whether to laugh or cry.

He stood in the back of the theater, hoping all had somehow been mended between the beginning and end of Act II. There was a hug, full of warmth and pride, and met with stiff coldness.

"You were wonderful! You have such a beautiful singing voice; it's so bright and distinctive!"

There was no answer, only an icy stare before turning on a heel, heading to linger in the dressing room before finally going home from the opera house for the last time.

V.

Over the cheery strains of "The Best Things in Life are Free," the question was posed in an almost whisper, as if it wasn't sure it should be said: "Do you know what this reminds me of? That rule you had when we did theatre where you wouldn't let your dad come see you because—"

"Go on. You can say it."

"No, I want you to, so you can hear how ridiculous it sounds, because it was. It still is, even now."

“Because he made a career out of using his voice, and I- I didn’t want him to hear what mine sounded like on stage.” It did sound ridiculous, but then again, it always had.

“And?” came the reply. It didn’t sound like a question. It sounded like an “I told you so.”

“And when he finally did, he told me it was beautiful. You know, he was one of the few people who I actually believe meant it.”

If only I had said thank you.

The Artists



Walking in Muted Colors | *Kyle Hemmings*

Ed Ahern

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He's had a hundred twenty stories and poems published, and two books.

Katarina Boudreaux

Katarina Boudreaux is a writer, musician, composer, tango dancer, and teacher -- a shaper of word, sound, and mind. She returned to New Orleans after circuitous journeying. www.katarinaboudreaux.com

Jacqueline Brown

Jacqueline Brown is a native Chicagoan who currently lives and works on the East Coast. This is her first published piece.

Kyle Hemmings

Kyle Hemmings lives and works in New Jersey. He loves urban photography, manga art, and sci-fi films of the 50s. His blog is at <http://upatberggasse19.blogspot.com/>

Julia Rose Lewis

Julia Rose Lewis is poet in residence at the University of Wales archeology. She is a member of the Moors Poetry Collective. She is published in 3am Magazine, Backlash, etc.

Jennifer Lothrigel

Jennifer Lothrigel creates intuitively, drawing from the mystery of her body and soul. Her work has been published in Trivia - Voices of Feminism, Narrative Northeast, We' Moon and more.

Lindsay McLeod

Lindsay McLeod trips over the horizon every morning. He has won several prizes and awards and stuff for poetry and short fiction and published his first co-authored poetry collection, My Almost Heart, in 2015. He currently writes on the sandy Southern edge of the world, where he watches the sea and the sky wrestle for supremacy at his letterbox. He prefers to support the underdog. It is presently an each way bet.

Michael Minassian

Michael Minassian lives in San Antonio, Texas. His poems have appeared in such journals as Galway Review, Meadow, and Poet Lore. Amsterdam Press published his poetry chapbook *The Arboriculturist* in 2010.

Tom Montag

Tom Montag is most recently the author of *In This Place: Selected Poems 1982-2013*. In 2015 he was the featured poet at Atticus Review (April) and Contemporary American Voices (August).

John L. Stanizzi

John L. Stanizzi -- author of *Ecstasy Among Ghosts*, *Sleepwalking*, *Dance Against the Wall*, *After the Bell*, and *Hallelujah Time!* His poems have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Rattle*, and others. He teaches English at Manchester Community College.

Ryan Warren

Ryan Warren and his family live by the sea. His poetry has previously appeared in *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *The Mindful Word*, *Ekphrastic* and *Plum Tree Tavern*.

Oban West

Oban West tries to make sense of life by writing poems and stories. He is a father, a husband and very sly. Another haiku.
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Judy Wood

Judy Wood is a mixed media artist and poet, who lives in the Arizona desert. Poetry is an extension of her art; painting pictures with words. Follow her journey @aztreasures.

