



# Veterans Day

by Hugh Findlay

(“Veterans Day” mobile version)

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.

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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

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