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Phalaenopsis

A single phalaenopsis bloom rises on its sturdy stem
above my steaming coffee. The orchid's fleshy
bilateral orbs seem gynecoid in shape and serve
to curve my attention toward its mysterious
tendriled center. I sip and consider this
common tropical genus, the profane,
yet prayerful, nature of it
and how

just before dawn, I knelt, as a midwife does,
on a bedroom floor beside the steaming body
of a birthing woman. Her head down, rooted
amidst knees, arms, her orbbed pelvis rising
like the orchid, like the sun—no matter
how common, how many billion
beading mornings—her singular
tendriled center
promising.



April

Eliot was right. April is a cruel month, when tulips are too bright for winter eyes, and the lilac air steals the breath, suffusing danger with desire.

From my sunny kitchen window, I watch a male cardinal proclaim his desire from the budding crown of a sugar maple, until

like some heat-seeking missile, he drops and trails a female through air. Suddenly, she veers left and flies right at me

on the other side of the reflective glare—*No!* I wave my arms as her head hits the double pane and the bared complicities of April

kill her. Penitent for my human part, I leave the house and bear her chilling warmth, heavy as a stillborn's, to the muddy foot of the maple.

The Cornell lab of ornithology says, every year there are a billion like her. I dig and feel the suck and pull

of innumerable buds, far above my head, like insatiable sapping mouths, and the sweet blood running up to fill them.

I lift my eyes and watch their fat red bodies dance in the April air, as if they will dance forever, as if

they will never fall, until I see Eliot was wrong: life makes no promises.



The Way Art Lives

She does not forget
the small lives
lost in the making
of her new silk scarf,
smooth and supple
as newborn skin
(its spun protein
fibers finer than hair).
Its yielding folds hold her
the way the gentlest cocoon
holds tender wet folds
of metamorphosis,
the way the pia mater
holds supple memory,
the way the amnion
in her womb
held her buried son.



Doing Good

More often than not
the most you can do,
said Lao-Tzu, some
two-thousand years ago,
is: imagine you are
a midwife. Do good
without show or fuss.
When the baby is born,
the mother rightly
will say: I did it,
I am equal to life!

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