



## Night Ringing

**Laura Foley**

Headmistress Press (Jan 11, 2016)

Softcover \$10.00 (108pp)

978-0-692-58595-5

*Sensual language and alliterative verses make this poetic celebration of traumas and triumphs a meaningful read.*

Poet Laura Foley's strong fifth collection, *Night Ringing*, ruminates on romance and family via autobiographical free verse.

Midway through the collection, a poem poses an important question: "How shall we make sense of these images, lapping over us, day and night..." The answer seems to come in the transformation of autobiographical vignettes into a variety of alliterative poems. Gently erotic language and moments culled from everyday life are used in poems that commemorate family members and lovers, lost and found.

Life's traumatic and triumphant moments provide the emotional poles for Foley's poetry. At one end sit her rough childhood, including her parents' divorce and her mother's drinking; the several bad-news phone calls of the title poem; and her two failed marriages, one to a Moroccan Muslim and one to a Holocaust survivor. At the other end are her joy at giving birth, making love to a woman for the first time, and getting syrup straight from a maple tree one early morning in March.

Apart from odd, almost accidental end rhymes, Foley's verse relies most on alliteration and internal rhyming. In "Turtle," the titular creature is described as "solid, strong, six feet long, / astonishing as any human / born from the mystery of sea." In form, the pieces range from the prose paragraphs of "Missing in Action" and "WTF!" to the haiku-like brevity of the four-lined "Leaving Him." What unites these variously structured poems is their careful sensuality: the smell of a magnolia, the flavor of Moroccan food, or the noise of a church windowpane breaking during her son's wedding.

One of the collection highlights is "In the Honda Service Area," a poem that unexpectedly unites modern technology with ancient literature. While a woman describes her impending hip replacement surgery to a friend, Foley tries to concentrate on Homer's *The Iliad*:

*But, time and again, her new hips, titanium and strong as a god's,  
break through the Bronze Age scene, her voice  
a wave dissolving the Trojan beach.*

Repeated sounds, along with appropriately martial terminology, bring the disparate settings together.

The collection is dedicated to Foley's partner, Clara Giménez, and lesbian romance is a subtle undercurrent. "I Go Down to the River" uses erotic vocabulary to reflect on the poet's first sexual encounter with a woman, such as "dipping my fingers in the chill East River, / tasting salt from the sea." Likewise, "Two Women" employs the language of taste:

*[we] savor sweet mangoes*

*we buy on the street.  
Dripping, soft and ripe,  
we eat by moonlight...*

By turns sensual and nostalgic, the poems in *Night Ringing* find the meaning in daily life. Foley's work is especially recommended for fans of Jane Hilberry and Adrienne Rich.

REBECCA FOSTER (February 18, 2016)

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