

## Blink

By Tracy Rice Weber

Our fifth-grade science book explained they use oxygen with luciferin  
to produce light without heat. Grandmothers warned: if one flies  
into your house somebody's going to die. I knew it  
took a good sixteen or more to light up an empty jar.

At dusk after school let out for summer, we ran barefoot on the clay  
banks of the creek to catch them, a game of luminary points. Before  
neighbor boys mixed in, just the finding was enough. We'd stand hushed  
under loblollies, waiting to charm them from the night—

light on our outstretched hands; find their way across our palms  
and down our fingers, returning to twilight.

The teacher told us they blinked to attract a mate, what I figured  
even then was a hazard— to find joy making light

out of nothing, without heat and without trying.

It was a down-the-street boy who gave me my first ring.  
Holding my elbow, he took the bug from me gently, before  
I had a chance to protest. With his left hand he pinched

its black head and used his right, privileged as a surgeon, to separate the luminous  
jelly from its abdomen— rub his sticky crime onto my ring finger.

Across the creek, little girls with glowing fingers played tag on damp clover.

By September we didn't even notice they were gone.

Tracy Rice Weber

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