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Come in...and be captivated...



"Study; Suddenly a Serpent" by Jan Collins Selman;
<http://jancollinsselman.com/GardenGallery/TheGardenGallery.html>

After The Lie

by Richard Krawiec

...she promises repentance with eager kisses, grasping fingers which clutch and fold the cloth of his sleeves, as if holding the fabric tightly will pull his body back so it will once again fill his clothing.

Because he is shrinking; his cells have boarded the bullet train to nanoland. She watches his dungarees pool at her feet, lifts the empty shirt, shakes it.

The microscope beckons from her end table in the back bedroom. It sits, layered with dust, unused since the last time. She knows she should grab it, snap the illumination bulb on, and search for him, draw him up in a pipette, mount him on a slide, culture his cells, revive him. Raise him to maturity.

But through the frosted glass of her front window the horizon is streaked, mango and rose light glows behind the blue-rimmed cirrus clouds. She releases his shirt and steps forward into the dawn, into the welcoming coo of mourning doves.

The Forest

by Linda Delmonico Prussen

Like Alice in Wonderland
She hoped to find a rabbit hole
If not a hole
A break in the woods
A break in the woods where she'd never venture
'Cause the woods were dark, and creepy and cold
But how much darker, creepier and colder

Could they be?
Than where she is now?
Not much she decided.
Having conquered
All her other fears
And being no better off for it
She decided to conquer
One more
She looked into the forest
As a claustrophobia
Worse than anything she felt
On a packed A train
Overtook her
But instead of holding her back
It propelled her forward.
First steps
Taken tentatively
Next more bold
Having committed
To not finding her way back
But finding a way out
At the other end
Past looking for a clearing
She hoped
To accept
The darkness
See beauty in the canopy
Of green above her
Or richness
In the brown below
She hoped...
After all,
She couldn't find light
Outside in the bright sun
Or beauty
When she was told
It was right in front of her
She hoped
She could find it

In the darkness
Willing for acceptance
She ventured on...
The quiet
Sounded loud
And her footsteps
Soft
The gray bark of the trees
Looked like faces
If she stared too long
And she did
The branches
Like outstretched arms
She dared them to try and reach for her
And except for tiny scratches
Here and there
Remained unscathed
She walked deeper
Until she was fairly certain
No one could find her
She leaned against
A scary monster tree
And started to cry
Her tears burned
Hot little rivulets
Down her cheeks
She didn't fear
That she couldn't find her way out
She feared that she would
And that it wouldn't matter anyway

The Nights

by Linda Delmonico Prussen

The nights are the worst
Always the worst

The days are filled with light
Punctuated by sound
Swirled with color
Disrupted by distraction
Blessed distraction
Work
Play
Responsibility
Fun

The nights are
Unchanging
At 10
Or 20
Or 40

The days vary
The illusion of control
Gives hope

But the nights
Vacant of light
Overflow with unwavering
Flat
Rigid
Darkness

Devoid of sound
Hollow
Empty
Flood with deafening silence
The perfect field
For demons
To come out and play

To terrorize the plains of awareness
Mortality
Morality
Apprehension
Guilt
Longings for lost loved ones
Thoughts of things unsaid
Words unspoken come easily now
When there's no one to hear
And they all spar merrily
Oblivious to your presence

As you fight
The fears
The tears
And pray there's a reason to pray
And that you'll drown uneventfully
Into unconsciousness
To face another day

A Giggle like wind chimes

by Linda Delmonico Prussen

A giggle like wind chimes
The flash of a smile
An almost imperceptible wink
Like pink cotton candy at the carnival
Light, airy, sweet, and meaningless

Hides desire
Longing and want
Once recognized
Could shatter a day at the fair
Just as the crash of thunder
Or the flash of lightening
Could irrevocably disrupt
A steamy summer day

Shatter and destroy her
Perhaps startle, maybe inconvenience him
If he had any feelings for her at all
And maybe even if he didn't...
Though she believed he did

A belief that helps her to get out of bed in the morning
And helps her to sleep at night
A belief that despite being able to have nothing
They have something

And that the characters created in her mind
Could act on their impulses
Could laugh together
And hug
And kiss
And play
Could ride the roller coaster
And the Ferris wheel

They would stay

Long after the carnie has cried out his final game
After the carousel has stilled
Its music ceased
After the children's delighted squeals have quieted
And the last light on the funhouse has gone out

Her characters would eat popcorn
From the same butter stained bag
Gritty with salt

As they walked home
Holding hands

Or perhaps not...
Perhaps like a cornfield maze
It's better the walls around them
The constraints put upon them
The borders that stop them
Stop her

Instead it's a kindness
Just believing
If the walls were down
The fields of deep green grass
Would roll out endlessly
In front of them
For them to lay on
Staring up together
At the feathery white clouds
Floating through infinite blue skies
Or as the rich, black velvet expanse above them
Became dotted with diamonds
They'd get lost in each other

The boundaries offer protection
Protection from knowing
He never wanted her anyway

Perhaps he sees her
As pink cotton candy at the fair as

Light, and airy, and sweet, and meaningless

Leftover Leaves

by Cheryl Somnese

The vein-filled shells lay there

brown—dried out,

huddled in a corner

on the porch.

Stiff broom bristles failed to collect their remains

during spring cleanup

so they patiently waited:

some coiled at the edges

others chaotically folded as if misplaced laundry items.

I considered sweeping them into plastic sacks

that stunk ever-so-slightly of

stale coffee grinds.

But an overhead oak

beckoned

as wind rustled its outstretched branches,

urging me

to let the others greet them

in the fall.

Grandma's Last Wish in Me
(A Trip to the Old Country)

by Cheryl Sommese

How far you have strayed from me,
once greeting me with passion.
Immersed in a language not mine yet learning some things,
you kissed my forehead
uttering the word, bella:
full, billowy lips
swelled like fleshy grapes
plucked
from a stranded vine.
And I smiled with pride
that I was blessed to live in two worlds—
although I could not articulate such
it flourished in my soul like mushrooms in caves.

And the wonder of your animation remained

even when I grew older and drew distant from
your ways,
wishing to blend like Johnny and Jane.
Temporarily eschewing a hybrid figure
but you didn't abandon me
or hush the melody that filtered music to my core,
at least not then.

Perhaps I wore out my welcome
for when I visited you twice:
the country that morphed into a living likeness
of your beauty--
you seemed loath to greet me.

I was not one of you
nor were my ancestors,
instead we were castoffs
settling in a lesser place:
and you scoffed
without ever getting to know
the things I care for
what I believe.

Instead you colored my head with your own thoughts,
an irreverent street artist fashioning a
template caricature.

Supposing everyone from my land deserved
the same brushstroke.

I long for the memories I once believed were real
I yearn for the romance that lived in my heart.
I hum a song in the meadow but you no longer marvel
everything is different since my last wish departed.

The View/The City

by Sophia DiGonis

City lights shining out my window
in the evening.
Glowing like a sequined handbag
as the moonbeams bless
The town with the colors of
the spectrum.

The city awakens at night
ready to party
As the streetlights dance
flickers of red, yellow and green.

Cars riding along the roads and highways

add to the blissful dance and
party in the streets
Clubs and bars are filled
with performers, good times and
drinking buddies.
Blinking signs of ads from
vacancies to commercial campaigns blaze.

The stagnant lights of liquor stores
and pharmacies add just the right touch-
That wink of trouble in the air-
to the energy of what one can find
in the city at night.

Ah, the magic of moonbeams...

The moonbeams that awaken the lights
in the city at night.

The moonbeams that bless
the cigar-filled rooms with drinks
of brandy and gin
And a pianist, a jazz singer, a bass player,
a saxophonist, a trumpeter--
All playing out-
The colors blessed by these moonbeams
Of the night.

Such blessings of the moonbeams
are awakened in the lights outside
Both moving and stagnant,
the clubs, the liquor and drug stores
Around the corner
The streetlights dancing
and the cars' lights twirling on the roads.

From the top floor, I am looking down to see Heaven.

The colors shine, the lights gleam, the cars dance.

The scene takes my breath away.

The city glows, the lights move, the cars dance--
The night awakens...

The spark of excitement of the theaters, a blue candlelit dinner
at the Mad Hatter's Tea Room,
Or a quiet drive in the downtown district, or the historical
part of town--
The beauty of all of it lies
in the blessings of the moonbeams
Lighting up the town finding the city lights
shining and glimmering on my face...

The city awakens at night
and with that in mind
My dreams become a reality
By this sight

The colors blink, beam and shine
all showing diverse signs for different reasons
But contributing a touch of unity and continuity
To this entity, this life
We call the city....

The Hunt

by Jim Fuess

Pip the cat struts

Into the house and

Deposits a dead mouse

At my feet and waits

For approval.

Theodore The Magnificent II

A Pembroke Welsh Corgi

Sniffs the mouse and snorts.

He lies down on his bed and

Dreams of hunting gazelle on

The Serengeti Plains.

Order and Chaos

by Jim Fuess

At night when I take off my shoes

before going to bed.

I put them on the floor reversed.

Right to left, left to right.

This way when I wake in the morning

I will realize that

chaos doesn't turn to order

overnight.

Insomnia

by Jenna Kelly

Prowling within the night
Comes the thoughts provoked by
Day
And the warmth of mental blood;
Disrupted emotions draw
Curtains on your mind's eye while
Shaped
As a lynx, they pop your sleep
Like a Yucca-scent balloon.

Time and Space

by Michelle Kennedy

Thirsty, sun-parched
I lift my head to the sky
searching for a heavy cloud
or two

Maybe it will crack, like an egg
rain will fall, endlessly upon me
drenching my body, my soul
Some light as butterfly kisses
Others more insistent, like a lover

I hear the low drone of insects
a truck in the distance
a little creature scuttering nearby
All around me rock, green, trees
A Lemon Squeeze
Until we reach a summit
or two
The sky openly greets us
On the horizon I see many things

Seamlessly time and space meet here

We stop for a moment
or two
I soak it all in
We move on
The sky heard me
Responded
I am wet to the bone

Memory

by Michelle Kennedy

Memory, I suppose,
has a life of its own
....lingers....
around the edges
between conscious
and unconscious
Welcome or not
it persists, tenacious
just below the surface

(Unexpected images
such as the texture
of your strong hands
the uneven fingernails
worn and ink-stained
from words set down
meticulously written
gently and sensuously)

My tears cannot disintegrate
The sun cannot burn away
Time cannot destroy

these memories

On a Metaphor

by Michael Ceraolo

The Turkish Nobelist, Orhan Pamuk, likens his liking of literature
to the need of a patient for medicine on a daily basis
Far be it from me to disagree,
but the metaphor doesn't work for me
For me the need to read is more like the need to eat
(Perhaps the translator was seeking to encompass this metaphor as well,
what with the increasing incidence of many Americans
to treat food as medicine)

It is said that humans can go several days without food;
fortunately,
I have never had to go a day without eating,
and,
at least since the age of three,

I have never had to go a day without reading either

There is an almost limitless variety of things to eat or read,
from hundreds of cultures around the world
Cost aside for the moment,

the limit to the former
is the lack of access to the necessary ingredients;
the limit to the latter is the lack of adequate translations

I will try something new on somebody else's recommendation,
but I will only champion something that accords to my taste
(and I will never compel someone to believe as I do)

Parents and educators should stop force-feeding food and literature
No healthy child has ever starved themselves of food;
no one so inclined will starve themselves of reading

I do not read or eat anything I don't like,
including
things that are supposed to be good for me
(and help me to live longer in order to
read and eat more things I don't like)

Sometimes the texture of the piece disagrees with me,
like peppers or propaganda

Sometimes I can't stomach it,
like citric acid or fundamentalist intolerance

Sometimes I ingest so-called junk food,
like potato chips or sportswriting

Sometimes I have a rich allegedly empty dessert
that I'm supposed to feel guilty about
(but don't),
like chocolate or romance novels

Sometimes lighter fare digests better,
like salads or satire

Sometimes meatier fare is needed,
like steak or Shakespeare

Sometimes I sate myself to my absolute limit
at an all-you-can-eat buffet or someone's complete works

I like nothing better than tunafish or poetry

I stay away from trendy fare,
like tofu or memoirs

My metaphor does intersect
with the Nobelists in one way:
sometimes his daily dose is his own writing,
sometimes my daily bread is my own writing

Bon Appetit

Twelve and One

by Kat Farrin

out on the boat
we never said the number

"bad luck" my brother said
we'd count the lobsters out of the barrel
one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight
nine, ten, eleven, twelve, twelve and one...

the same magical number
of women before the patriarchy kicked in
not mentioned

i am back to the hometown

after these twelve and one years

my father passed on long ago
his words echo, "down for the summer or just the weekend?"

there was a time i took offense
my cousin's wife in her nose held high tone said, " i thought 'you' were a
summer person"
that was the fall i came back to pick apples
now i have my reply ready
with a hint of delight, "down for the summer"

displaced from walking 7 miles of flat beach
back and forth
to going round and round, up and down
island hills

at noon, out of practice
i hear two women talking
coming up fast... from
behind

then at sunset
the sound of the thrush
ahhh
still there in the same place

the stretch
where at night in consuming darkness
i used to recite.. yea though i walk
through the valley
of the shadow...

If Antigone Had Been My Mother

by Vince Corvaia

She would have
succumbed to Creon,
left her brother's body

on the field of battle
had Antigone been
my mother.

Creon would have
married her and moved
to Miami

before the South Beach
renaissance, when
the porches of art deco hotels
were filled with poor immigrants
rocking toward the sea.
Creon would be

a controlling husband,
intercepting Ismene's letters,
returning them unopened.

Antigone wouldn't be
allowed to drive or work.
She'd spend her days
transfixed on the porch,
watching all those
sunburned bodies
lying inert
on their bright blankets
in the sand.

Retail

by Vince Corvaia

Old people
walking the mall
before the stores open,
their bright sneakers
and their conversation,
squeaks and murmurs

as the young managers
unlock their chain gates
with their minds on
profit and lunch
and never the coming
of their deaths.

The Past

by Vince Corvaia

The past
is a yellow dog
that follows you
along the dirt road.

You can ignore it
and keep running
or you can turn around
and crouch

to stroke its
smooth, familiar fur.

The past just wants
to be remembered.

Your mother found
the small hard tumor

behind its left ear
and told your father

they couldn't
afford surgery.

On a shiny Saturday morning
she told you

to take the dog for a walk
and lose him.

But no matter
how fast you ran,
he kept up,

tongue lolling.

The past is that way.

You can't shake it off.

It will happily follow,
thinking time is a game.

It will always love you.

Anniversaries

by Vince Corvaia

Do we celebrate
anniversaries

for the same reason
we build museums?

Because the calendar says so,
we walk single-file through

musty, red-roped rooms

of the past, resurrecting
weddings, birthdays,
suicides
for another twelve hours.
The knife with the
calcified frosting
from the reception,
dried blood
long since soaked through
a yellow golf shirt.
We peer at these artifacts
in the dim light of small windows,
clutching our complimentary programs,
following the ghostly docent
as she guides us deeper into the labyrinth
of carpeted memory,
of Muzak muted for what's lost.

Before I Can Find My Way

by Nicole M. Bouchard

Before I can find my way back into the writing, the world without boundaries, seemingly endless golden streams and smooth, uneven roads wrought in contradictions, unexpected turns of delight and spirals down through cloud, gossamer-like stairways stained with the peachy-pink of unforgiving sunsets, those ends that are foreseen, unshakeable and yet redeeming in their release...

Before I can shed the heavy clothing of obligation, expectation, the voices of them and there, time, place, history and encumbered memory-muddied mind to walk barefoot through the grasses of what I wish was or the leave-strewn forest paths of what might've, could've been or in my wildest dreams could be again underneath a sky too dim to hurt my seer eyes, too bright to frighten the heart of a woman who no longer wants to be hidden by night...

Before I can unabashedly wrap the bared soul in cool silks of tomorrow, bear a light crown of white gold which has been melded since the day I was born, its presence inlaid with every grief, happiness, rage and love, both ferocious and gentle, a comfort to some, an undoing for others should the blackest black of their actions rise above the box Pandora had better left closed... the one in which only hope remained, the woes and fears of the world scattered to the winds by those trembling pale hands which didn't realize that they were not responsible for the cause nor consequence of lifting the lid... the nature of the human condition was simply first realized, acknowledged in the eyes of a woman who could see it as no one before her had... this order of things that we resort to first: fear, judgment, oppression, violence of word or action, betrayal; before the hope that waits collecting dust on the bottom, often discovered too late...

Before all this wisdom grants me entry back into the true words, those that you must earn the privilege to harness,

Before the gates open and every element of beauty returns to my imagination, peace to my dreams, passion to the ink I've bled,

Before all this, I must gather the pieces of what I will own. I must walk across burning coals and vanquish the demons I encounter who linger in the palace halls where I once danced and feasted. I must call to order my dreams, make them stand and account for themselves. When the stripes of the tigers I've slain appear visible beneath my skin, when I no longer fear the dimensions of all, that, as a writer, I can be, when the sweet and the fierce meld, I will stand upon the hillside at night under the full moon to meet you.

We will bow to each other, recognizing we are two parts of a whole. I will tell you of all that I've seen and journeyed through in our time apart. You will tell me of the nothingness, the waters from which you arose to return to me. I pulled you from the stone of life once, never having anticipated that I would one day have to wrench you from my heart. Yet here again, without my having to reach for you, you are here in my hand... and I put pen to paper.

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