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Come in...and be captivated...

 x

"Moonlit Raven" by Linda Woods; <http://www.lindawoodsphotography.smugmug.com/>

Barrier

by Kate LaDew

it hurts a little to know you're out there
smiling at everyone
innocent
it hurts a little
like a scar
like that little scar between my thumb and index finger
nearly lopped it off
breaking that flower pot against the window to get back in
it's only a little thing
but tough
raised
I can feel it like a barrier
keeping my hands from being beautiful
I press on it when I'm nervous
remember how cold that dirt was
how I sat for thirty minutes before I stopped bleeding
and you never came over
I knead it and it won't go smooth
just keeps living in me like a smile I can't forget

it's not that I want you again
it's not that I hate you
I just wish I could open the paper, find out you died and finally be happy.

Old House - New Home

by Carol J. Rhodes

On a cold November day, a house at the end
of a rough gravel road called to me.
As a weathered picket fence, high weeds, and
tall elm trees stood guard,
the rusting chain of a porch swing creaked
its welcome.

Humpbacked trunks and armoires
embraced treasures of photographs
and vintage clothes, while unmade beds,
unwashed dishes, and silverware stacked by

the sink appeared as if their keepers
had just gone to town,
instead of to the graveyard.

Butterflies fresh from cocoons
and a nest of fledgling robins
give hope that someday
the house, too,
will have new life.

Built of cypress
by skilled hands a century ago,
dust and cobwebs lingered in every corner,
undisturbed by winter's wind
and summer's heat
which seeped through her walls
when no one was looking.

Firmly set atop thick steel beams,
two heavyweight trucks and five husky men
escorted the four-square Texas house,
shuddering and groaning,
to the spot overlooking the Yegua Creek
that she and I now
contentedly call home.

The Voice

by Philip Jackey

And it was on this day
that I heard his voice—
soft as pillows yet distinct.
And it made me nervous.

I can't recall his sound,
but I knew it was him.
A kind and vulnerable tone,
that never stood a chance like snow in the Florida heat,

where he moved the summer after
the worst school year of his adolescence.
And there was never a moment for chance
when being the brunt of my jokes,
every single one,
his fat belly,
his constant smell of barbecued chips,
his crooked teeth like old wood,
his confidence. . .
I brought him hours of rain pour,
with no signs of letting up.
Because it made me feel good making him feel bad.

And these days it rains a lot it seems,
I often hear his voice, makes me nervous.
And I don't feel good.

11/17/11

by Michael Ceraolo

November 17, 2011,
and
a walk through the park before winter
makes such a walk an arduous trek
The bluestone looks almost green
as the creek flows over it,
while
in dozens of places along the way
the edges of rock above water
have been eroded away,
creating
many small waterfalls,
and
in one or two places where
the sidewalls of the creek bed
have been gouged out,
are
what could be considered small caves

And
there are concrete cylinders
lying on their sides on the side of the creek,
twin mysteries:
how did they get there?
and for what purpose are they there?
The various trees are mostly bare,
except
for a few stubborn leaves that haven't fallen yet
and even fewer and more stubborn leaves
that have refused to change color
There is a sea-serpent-shaped tree
with its root tentacles reaching up
to grab hold of the ground,
body pointing down toward the creek,
and
the head holding itself up proudly
There are other trees,
with counterparts on the other bank,
that lean across the creek and look
like crossed swords,
sentries
guarding the airspace above the creek
And
there are man-made wonders too:
on the underside of a bridge
is a large watermain bringing life
from the lake, through a pumping station
and
there is one solar panel
straining to capture the sun
and store it underground,
as the sun plays peekaboo,
now shining brightly though coldly,
now hiding behind snow-sky clouds
that promise to fulfill the weather forecast,
and will do so later this evening-----

Crab Apples of Deceit

by Michael Lee Johnson

I purchased the wind with your deceit.
You planted crab apple trees in my yard,
in my emotions, in my orchard.
You arrived at my door with a green impulse
before checking where stop lights were.
I'm no longer a fabric of dreams.
Yes, my behavior goes back
along many old dusty trails;
leading back to the villain
of my youth. The devil of the Gospels.
I'm beyond that now, flapper
of eagle wings.
Working the night shift
of my aging life.
I now know the real risks of loving you,
cashing in on no returns,
even during the best of times.
I'm an aging buck with horns,
with confetti in my heart.
Cherry-filled dreams are nothing but stems of memories.
At times, no sleep, just dreams hold the memories tight;
your lips aren't there to seal on my flesh.
Am I in the present or the past?
I refuse letters that start "dear baby".
I sense transfiguration in our bodies:
you the ballerina, dancer of silver coins;
I, golden boy, 25 cents for shoeshine,
\$10 for street sluts.
I'm now on social security,
I use "The Clapper,"
on/off for sexual ignition.
When I release this poem
to the world we no longer
connect together.
Aging is no more than a puzzle,
the cruel of dark, crude

asphalt softened in summer sun.
Places where we made love
now crucified on red walls,
nicotine, blood, altar stains rejections.
I remain master of words,
you dance writer, choreographer.
Uneducated, I live in my trailer.
I bring this all down to a few words.
I once purchased it in the wind
with your deceit, now-
silent wings of black crows,
empty hard liquor,
vodka bottles,
dormant shadows.
Closet of memories.
Past tense, future tense,
deceit.

A Still New Continent in Which to Dwell

by A.J. Huffman

It's not attitude.
It's age.
I'm too old
to follow you around.
I'm not a puppy.
If you want me
you have to take me.
I'm not a gift.
There's no string
tied in a bow
around my neck.
I'm not a lock.
You don't have to pick
or decode.
I'm a door.
And all you have to do
is come in.

The Innocent

by Katie O'Sullivan

I wonder if I could find under the Grecian sun,
the olive tree in a corner of a graveyard,
sentinel for a tiny grave
of a babe who chose to dream on
after a glimpse of this world,
innocent of St. Augustine's threats
or limbo's fog.

I wonder if I could find
the cold, marble crypt on which we rested,
the teenage mother, drained of tears,
who sat beside me as I held a shoebox in my arms,
offered by the hospice's nun, tied with butcher's string.
Bata Shoes- Fit for a Queen.
A box that conferred royalty to the babe within;
a casket, beautified, dignified, tucked all around with heather,
plucked from native fields.

We waited in the day's full heat beside the olive tree,
while an earthen cradle was dug, strewed with violets
blessed with holy water by a rural priest.

I wonder if I could find under the Grecian sun,
the taverna where we lingered,
anointing each other with brimming eyes,
downing glasses of ouzo
to ease the flow of sob-swallowing words,
loving the child,
who dreams on in guileless peace.

Speaking Chinese

by Katie O'Sullivan

In first grade I am surprised to learn I'm not Chinese.
A teacher's note to my parents alerts them to my mistaken assumptions.
I run to my room, sit still on my bed,
close my eyes, scrunch up my forehead
and remember as far back as I am able - when you're that young,
it's not so far to go-
and digging deep I remember floating paragraphs of talk,
wrapped around feelings, images...
although the precious ability to speak Chinese has slipped away forever.

Recalling the memories that I reclaimed that day, I'm in Shanghai
between the ages of two and three, sitting cross-legged
on a small balcony overlooking street-crowd people who clap and squeal
as an old man with a baton directs a dusty, dancing bear
that circles around and around on hind legs,
giving fearsome growls while gleeful children
take turns poking him with sticks.

A disjointed recollection of weeks or months slides through my mind.

There's a tiny red-jacketed monkey clambering up to the railing,
tipping his cap, holding out his hand for a coin.
When festive crowds below, swirl off in the smoke of memory,
streets return to normal and only pedestrians, chanting street vendors
and the tall, Indian policeman uniformed in khaki shirt, shorts and turban,
directing traffic at the corner, are left.

Then my Amah, my hovering nurse, and I
wave my brother off to his British school.
He sits proud like a major-domo in cap and school jacket-
in our family's shiny red enameled rickshaw,
pulled by the boy called 'Napoleon'.

I proudly salute my father,
dressed in navy and gold braid,
who goes off to work.

Reluctantly, I am led by Amah to the park where she yammers
for hours, seated on a bench with her friends,

all copies of each other in their slicked, dark, knotted hair,
white shirts and baggy black pants.
I can still imagine their high, screeching voices
so happily unaware of their future.

We hire a rickshaw ride home
and Amah and the rickshaw boy squabble too long over fare
and I, restless, fearless,
curse him in perfect pitch, vulgar Chinese
to Amah's pride and amusement.

If I Were in Love

by Tim Bellows

for Marnie

I would enwrap you round,
cover you
with frail hands,
be and know the ways
your skin breathes,
be entranced by your
perfected heft of body.
Good arms and legs.

I would
leap us clear through
onto the first
and last
of heaven's shimmered worlds,
make that my blue business.

I would be your
balm and aching call, be
a high sky's white-tie orchestra
where French horns - thousands - play,
gold-polished, tireless.

If I were in love.

Manila Bay 1898

by Gary Beck

Into your tropic harbor
in shimmering motion
sailed the upstart ships,
intent on conquest.
Your aging armada,
a rusting relic of empire
still hoping to possess you,
was compelled to action,
but barely resisted the onslaught
of vigorous new masters
intent on acquisition,
sinking all objections
in the grin of victory.

Grace

by Vince Corvaia

Lines of black
crawl over a white page
like a gentle violation.

They sing lines of red
criss-crossing a white wrist,
beading up like angry bracelets,
bleeding out like tears from the heart.

Today I read
old wounds on a yellowed page,
poetry of youth and loss.

I see white scars against white flesh,
anger long since dried out,
hieroglyphics of an ancient civilization.

Only experts can decipher their meaning:
grace is what remains
in these lines whose secret reveals:

“I survived.”

History

by Vince Corvaia

She was a runaway
and not even college age,

or so it was said
about the crouching girl

with her arms outstretched
before the boy bleeding

on the pavement.
“Four dead in Ohio,”

Neil Young sang.
We all sang.

Yet what
does today's child

rushing across campus
to her next class

know of history?
When you're eighteen

forty-two years
is the wake

of an Olympic diver,
a rapt nation

watching
a tear in the surface

of a pool
so insubstantial

it's like
no one ever
fell at all.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kent_State_massacre.jpg)

The Post Office

by Carol Smallwood

The post office is new- one of those single stories
that could be a school or a factory
if it wasn't for the red, white, and blue sign
saying 'United States Post Office' with its symbol
that could be a bird, plane- or Superman looking for Truth, Justice,
and the American Way.

Once inside the smell confirms it as being an institution.
One of those *Lions Recycle For Sight* boxes for unwanted glasses
to "help someone see better" is in the lobby.

People coming in politely stand in line as directed by: ATTENTION!!!
Customer Line Forms on the RIGHT.
There isn't any clock- it could be because it is so new,
or perhaps so people won't get impatient waiting.

The hushed lines are not unlike confessional lines at St. John's--
the same air of wishing to be somewhere else.
Come to think of it, venial and mortal sins could be compared
with parcel post and priority rates
even though I heard now that you don't have to go to church on Sunday's
(or Saturday's) anymore
under the pain of mortal sin.

The clerks have a certain air, making you wonder
if they can tell what is inside your sealed mail--
like when you get inside the confessional
and the priest pushes aside the panel.

It is the luck of the draw who you get:
the one always smiling that only looks like she is smiling;
the one with puckers between their eyes you feel has to be more sincere;
the one you never know whether they are expressing humor or satire;
or the brisk one who never smiles.

Before the pilgrimage to the counter, after weighing,
I take my outgoing mail to one of the tables
and get out my stamps in a Halloween plastic grocery bag:
1 cent stamps with an orange and blue kestrel bird, 2 cent stamps with a red
-headed woodpecker,
5's with a toleware pitcher, 10's with round Salvador Dali-like clocks,
23's of a green George Washington, 37's of kittens and puppies
with spay/neuter messages-
some came from the USA Philatelic
and always looked different than their pictures.

It's hard to believe the first official U.S. stamps were only issued in 1847.

When I try thinking like an Egyptian
with an over three thousand year history
it's impossible
and I wonder how many cultures still haven't been discovered--
the Mayans weren't until the nineteenth century
and they were using the zero before anyone else.

I began collecting stamps when my grandchildren started arriving,
and bought commemorative stamp yearbooks the year they were born
to preserve for them a sense of the times.

After 9/11, there was a resurgence in stamps with the American flag;
a 28-page booklet providing the history of Old Glory from its beginning
had "over 95 pieces of patriotic ephemera
representing different aspects of American culture."

But somehow cans of soup lined to make stripes on the flag,
and toilet soap bearing the brand Our Country seemed lacking.

Leaving the post office fosters unsteadiness-
maybe it's the angle parking
or seeing all the incoming and departing trucks.

And wondering if there's anything that's mine.

I am still of that moment

by Azelina Flint

—I am still of that moment when you plunged your fingers into the molten
flesh that even God was yet to flame—

—to make a thousand dimples on the water in the current of my skin—

—we cruised and lapped in the steady thrashing—

—propelled in fountains that bore us upon the tides of foam—

—hardened in rigidity and strained into intensity as intertwined coral
wound close—we plunged and twisted on the ocean's floor—

—Our steam made bubbles—pressing into the dangling senses—

—you unraveled my hair to make a floor for encroaching ships that stole
and swam between us—

—undoing the cleft that seamed us—plucking out its thread with scissor-
hands—

—I cajoled those ships into my bosom—

—for I would embed every sight that pains you into my bone—

—that you might still breathe and taste me—

—Long ago—I felt you—resounded you—

—looked in and saw we held the same world—

—the same fur upon the bark that was pressed upon your neck-down—

—Then we were still—were the same—were blackness and dreams—

—there was no darkness—nor no empty space—

—only your soft lips in the moonlight of my dreams—

—it made me think of death and taste it—

—If this land were real—our worlds would not be spliced—
—For if this had never been—we would have seen—would have known
breath—
—But I have the congealed star-dust of a world half-known and half-tasted
in the rotten daguerreotype of your mouth—
—The rest is history, and it is worn out—

Dream Metamorphosis

by Agholor Leonard Obiaderi

The dream tied
A velvet cape
painted lashes and
rouge lips, prettier
than fantasy's pink bosom.

Reality came in the sharp
rays of morning sunlight
probing, then
tearing off the blindfold.

Suddenly, the enchanting
castle, bewitching in last night's soft
light dissolved into mere
brick and mortar,
crevices and blotches.

Last night's magic, the
romance that hugged
gentle candle light, melted
into the ugliness of
plain wax.

Ruby lips, softly-kissed,
hid, cracked and pinched in
dawn's scornful glare.

Subtract my imagination
from what I can actually
hold.

When I grip Aladdin's
magical lamp, I pray
for the night hours to
stretch forever.

The Five Frights

by Agholor Leonard Obiaderi

The First Fright.

Cold,
was the wind that shook
the trees, premature fruits
falling off

on ice-laden ground, useless
to fruit flies and us.

Detached means
you are marooned on a frozen
island without
income except a pocketful
of dry, tasteless seeds.

The Second Fright.

Many phrases escorted
the wind. Rumors
of more blight

of streets full
of cute brownstones playing
a game of foreclosures.

The Third Fright.

Images of pin-stripped suits

picking up plump bonuses
among the fallen fruits and
wiping them with broken lives.

The Fourth Fright.
Factory gates shut with
unusual austerity, their big
padlocks, an affront to past
loyalty.

The Fifth Fright.
White collars and blue
overalls, exodus towards
a cul-de-sac of recession.

But another contraction.
Then gate after gate shuts
against our redundant faces.

Twilight Flight

by Agholor Leonard Obiaderi

My children, Robin,
Jay and Phoebe.

Stay,
but I am glad you
are gone.

Your flight traced your
genes back to me.
My dead wanderlust your
future.

Your ambition surging
skywards over distant
seas developed wings to
purchase tomorrow's colors.

A nest that withstood
several windstorms, so
love kept predators
at bay, none there
snapping jaws.

I nursed your hungry
beaks. You
blind, naked, then
fledgling.

At present,
I am the one with the
useless wings,
my hair ringed gray.

I taught you to catch
flies on the wing. In this
growing twilight, this famine
of love, would
you do the same for me?

Noose Marks

by Agholor Leonard Obiaderi

The noose gripped
tightly, eyes shut
like retractable buds.

Black eyes mourned a
black mood and the
darkness in the terse
note he left
behind.

Drawn face, dead
by a cord hanging

from the nook in
the ceiling.

His weight hung
lighter than a whole
mountain
of worries that depressed
a tiny mind.

His lips pursed, the
string drawn tight
over those frustrations
he tried to reveal to deaf ears.

Even soft whispers
would have eased
the pain, saved
the day.

Feet now hanging in
mid-air, will henceforth
not travel over life's
stressful road,

each step a cry of
anguish, a plea
for help. Miles of
burdened existence dreaded
by frightened feet.

Third Eye Open

by April Salzano

I can see fire. I can feel
light. I can taste
colors from the pain of others.
Nothing is exempt
from ridicule or internalization.

Empathy is a tool
and I am building nothing
less than a frameless city.

A Pound of Flesh

by April Salzano

I pulled my little sister
from her place in front of the television,
led her to a dark corner
of a darker room. She was willing,
her body heavy and soft with sleep.
Scissors in hand, I grabbed
the thick brown hair. I hacked,
I cut, I arranged. She giggled.
You are going to be beautiful,
I kept saying. *There,*
all finished. Go show Mom.

We were sent to bed early. *Just wait
until your father gets home.* I didn't.
I let sleep take me, my heart fluttering through
my chest. My father's voice yanked me up
from slumber. I paddled to the surface.
Don't try to pretend you're sleeping.
Wire spatula in hand, he took me back

to the living room. My mother drew a sharp
breath inward, that peculiar affirmative.
I knelt, feeling the itchy material of the couch
against my cheek, the crumbs magnified.
He smacked, he hit, he stung.
You are going to be sorry, he kept saying,
knowing sorry had already set in
the thick welts. There, all finished.
And he walked away,
gripping tufts of hair in each fist.

Non-displaced Fractures

by Cheryl Sommesse

It's hard to say when it began to fracture,
imperceptible cracks becoming increasingly apparent
as the hurt refused to heal.

She tried desperately to address the problem,
pleading
yet systemically being brushed aside
like an irrational queen in need of
psych meds.

Then rains arrived,
washing away the filmy matter obstructing
views from her favored window.

It's clearer now,
so much so
that even resignation could be
an option.

Kinder's Face

by Cheryl Sommesse

Kinder's face was kind,
her green eyes danced about the room
when she thought others could see
and her thin lips
curled upwards,
almost as if life
was good.

Her small frame belied what was real
so
she played her role well,
carrying on with only minimal bouts
of melancholy
while well-timed giggles

served to define her resolve.

Perhaps we all wear masks,
painted features that
conceal stories.
Etching details we believe can
be true
if we wish hard enough.

I guess it's our defenses
that methodically assembles them,
taking care
not to make them too perfect
so secrets
are not exposed.

But Kinder was only seven,
and such a tender age
seems too young to conjure up
brilliant disguises.
But she did,
and everyone believed her---
but me.

Degrees

by Amy Sprague

I.
I am surrounded in color
the yellow haze, the wet purple
of lilacs, the orange chains
of rust and motor oil.
Here, I am space ready for filling.

II.
I am surrounded in weight
weight that pushes and hides
and blindfolds me in curtains

of blood and faceless entrance.
I am a void being filled with dirt,
a heavy shovel, a man's sweaty hands;
he fills me.
Here, I forget the weight for years.

III.
I am surrounded in cold;
after the music, there is a numbing
that spreads like ink;
a chill that never disperses
as I come undone in the mirror.
Here, my brain fills with lesions.

IV.
I am surrounded in heat and noise
I am surrounded in voices
calling my name, whispering to me.
I am surrounded by godless stars
where the vacuum of space fills my heart,
embedding tracks of memories
across my chest, intersecting my veins.
Here, I am white noise, breaking.
Here I am angry. So angry.
Here, alone in my room, I whisper
Be Brave, Resist, Fight

I touched the first sparks of a wild fire
before I learned the truth of pain.
Here, now,
I'm learning to fill within the wound.

Perspective

by John Dennehy

New York City's evil, the surface is everything.
The life is fast and the people are cold.
When I traveled to Central Africa,

the most shocking thing
was how genuine and friendly the locals were,
and I thought to myself; this is why I travel.

A few days after returning to New York I took a bike ride,
and miles from my house
in an unfamiliar residential neighborhood in Queens,
I got a flat.
I sat down on the curb and took out a map.

A man pushing a stroller with two children stopped in front of me
and told me there was a bike shop nearby.
I started walking, pushing the bike alongside me.
A few houses down an elderly man stepped out of his car
and offered me two bikes.
“They are just sitting in my garage now,
so you can take them if you think you can use them,” he said.
(I picked them up the next week.)

Three blocks later and I was at the bike shop.
The repairs would cost \$14. I had nine.
They did it anyway, no questions asked.

Routine can make anyplace seem dull and unbending,
but a fresh perspective reveals beauties that have been hidden
by their normalcy;
and that is the reason I travel.

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