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  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.”

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### **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](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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