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Come in...and be captivated...



"Fallen" by Linda Bigness; <https://www.studio245.net/>

About this image: "Take a journey through nature and explore luminous paintings that employ beeswax, pigments, and metal leaf in process-laden artworks. The work reflects our fragile natural surroundings and the process of using heated wax simulates the effect that

temperature change has had upon our environment." —from *Linda Bigness: Spring Thaw* exhibition at Vandervort Gallery

Poetry

With gratitude, we dedicate this page to 2018 WPWT Arts Patron, Ginger Peters. Ginger is a poet and non-fiction writer living in Santa Fe, NM with work published in various magazines over the past twenty-five years.

White Crow

by Yuan Changming

Perching long in each human heart
Is a white crow that no one has
Ever seen, but everyone longs
To be

Always ready
To fly out, hoping to bring back
A glistening seed or a colorful feather
As if determined to festoon its nest

Bio: Yuan Changming currently edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan and hosts Happy Yangsheng in Vancouver. Credits include ten Pushcart and three Best of the Net nominations, *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17), BestNewPoemsOnline.com, *Threepenny Review* and 1,399 others across 41 countries.

It Would Be Better

by Jonathan Douglas Dowdle

It would be better, if I did not know
That you are only stumbling over
The same passages, like words
The tongue hasn't quite mastered, but this seems to be
So much, too much, of what builds our bones
From the broken places.

I've given away my language
To the static it has already become,
The white noise prayers of late night television
That repeat like a wounded phrase,
Something said so often
It has been bled dry of the meaning.

It would be better if I still believed
You were capable of being someone more,
To dig your hands into the roots of your heart
And pluck the weeds from the garden;
But we press ourselves against the wounds of memory,
And dance cheek to cheek with our corpses,
As though the passage granted us eternity,
Rather than robbing us of all life.

I no longer have the language necessary
To walk these avenues, beneath
The boardwalk of the bones, of the graveyards,
Of the ashes we paint
Our faces with, and I no longer
Want the language of
Condemning, and forgetting,
While we crucify our futures
In the names of fallen idols,
And where memory serves only as
Our most secret Gods.

So when you paint your heart in snow, now,
I merely accept you are winter,
And no longer try to rise like a sun
To beat and bark against
All the things you would keep frozen
Within you.
But as tired as I am, in that deep, cold lethargy
Of all the things we leave to die, and all
The sparks of possibility within us
Left, in a glance, to burn out,
Perhaps, I too, am weary as winter,
And this has become my way
Of falling as snow.

In the Tributaries of Her Heart

by Jonathan Douglas Dowdle

Love was only ever a mythology, a deep, practiced religion
That she could kneel before
To drink from the fount of the world's passion,
Because it is easier to be the lover, than the loved,
Because the lover conquers,
But does not need to surrender.

We learn this way, so easily, because this is
The easiest way to teach the world,
The words that build the spine, the heart, the mind,
The soul. We learn to be the loved
Is only to be taken into another's brokenness,
To fill up
All their empty spaces.

The lover has the easiest story, breaking
A thousand verses
Against their own brokenness, and changing
From face to face, from touch to touch,
Like town to town, or dream to dream,
Only and ever to remain the same

I read the tributaries of her heart, this way,
Knowing she was caught in the seeking,
And fearful of being sought, and so knew
Our love could only exist
As a softer mythology, a dream where the heart
Never needed to deepen itself
Into its own expansion, nor embrace
All its own brokenness, for all I would say or give
Had no place
To be received, and the pale romance,
The tragedy of the knowing
Would be written out as the heart's great tragedy
Over which people knelt, and wept,
Joining in the grand mythology

That spoke as though it spoke love,
But spoke only
Love's absence.

Bio: Jonathan Douglas Dowdle was born in Nashua, NH and has traveled throughout the US. He currently resides in South Carolina. Previous works have appeared in *322 Review*, and *Hobo Camp Review*, with upcoming works slated to appear in *After the Pause*.

Noah's Fowl

by Tim Gavin

"You know what you left; you don't know what you'll find." —Haitian Proverb

If I would've known it was going to be like this,
I would've never returned to the poop deck
With the olive leaf in my beak; I would
Have kept flying using that branch
As a perch for the future, landing from
Time to time just to have a centering point
From where my freedom found its form.

I look now from this dead tree by the brown
River and can't find bread on any of these
Mountains that rise high into the sky
Only to realize they don't reach anything—
Not even the height of their own destiny.
I now fly from one stagnant puddle to another
Ignorant of tomorrow's promise.

Sonnet of Indifference

by Tim Gavin

The valley is indifferent to the mountain
And the mountain is indifferent to the river
And the moon to the stars and sun
And death to birth. Thirst to hunger.

The young girl, pregnant, donned
A wedding gown, going to a feast
For her, but she, too, is indifferent
To her finance who's playing dominos

In his father's tux who's indifferent
To the invocation and prayers and vows.
Forced union is indifferent till death
Does its part and where poverty

Perjures opulence. Sickness health. The girl
Sits atop the mountain while the wilderness
gathers hope and grace while her heart's
Inclined toward indifference.

Bio: Tim Gavin is an Episcopal priest, serving as the head chaplain at The Episcopal Academy, located in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania. He oversees the school's volunteer service cooperative and its partnership program with St. Marc's School in the Central Plateau of Haiti, which he visits three to four times a year. His poems have appeared in many journals and most recently in *The Anglican Theological Review*, *About Place Journal*, *Chiron Review*, *Digital Papercut*, *Evening Street Review*, *Screech Owl Review*, *HEArt On-Line Journal*, *The Lake*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *decomp magazinE* and *Blue Heron Review*. He lives with his wife and sons in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania.

Eclipse

by Anne Whitehouse

A silvery light
takes over the day,
a visible gloom
thought by the ancients
to presage disaster:
the forces of darkness
gathering.

I would not stare
into the sun
even blotted out
lest it blind me

like the face of God.
But all around me
are His works.
Let us cease
our petty striving,
and rest for a while
in this fold of time
to give due reverence.

Bio: Anne Whitehouse was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and graduated from Harvard College and Columbia University. She is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Meteor Shower* (2016) from Dos Madres Press. Her novel, *Fall Love*, has just been published in Spanish translation as *Amigos y amantes* (Compton Press). Her poetry, short stories, feature articles, and reviews have appeared in major newspapers, literary magazines, and other publications throughout the English-speaking world.

Recent honors include 2016 *Songs of Eretz* poetry prize; 2016 winner of the *Common Good Books'* poems of gratitude contest; 2016 *RhymeOn!* poetry award (first prize); F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald Museum poetry award (second prize), and 2015 Nazim Hikmet Poetry Prize. Last July Garrison Keillor read her poem, "One Summer Day on the Number One Train," on *The Writer's Almanac*. "One Summer Day on the Number One Train" was recently selected for an ELA diagnostic test to be administered to 300,000 high school students in the state of Louisiana over the next five years.

*

by Simon Perchik

Katherine is reading this
and in the slow rain between each word
she hears her lips closing in

the way a love note is folded
kept for years alone in a drawer
half wood, half as if its darkness

is after something else on the page
she can't remember touching before
vaguely, if someone older says so

though a star can be born and die
before its light reaches her eyes
holding on to these dim shapes

that have no sound yet—it's too soon
—she will forget how far and you,
what she hears at every chance.

*

by Simon Perchik

Though it's familiar this flower
doesn't recognize the breeze
wriggling out the ground

as that distance without any footsteps
—its petals have no memory left
no scent that can expand into mist

prowling for more darkness
the way moonlight tries to remember
once passing through the Earth

on all fours, sniffing for stones
hidden from where your fingers
will clasp each other sideways

and the dirt still close by
—will smother all that happened
has no past, means nothing now.

*

by Simon Perchik

And you still stutter
though between her lips
it's always night

or years from now
—the stars not yet alongside
have no seasons

brought this far
in the same darkness not even she
can remember wearing

as if it could fold back
by itself as mornings and waiting
—after all, how much more

can this dirt breathe in
before someone stops by
who's lost, has forgotten why

only now it's winter
that has something to do
with coming back and her arms.

Bio: Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Osiris Poems* published by box of chalk, 2017. For more information, including free e-books, and his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities," please visit his website.

www.simonperchik.com

Blue Velvet Ribbons

by Ivis Westheimer

Looking for it. Knowing it was there somewhere in the old trunk.
My prom dress—the one I wore the night I walked into my future.
I didn't step in. I rustled confidently in nylon organdy over full,
crisp, scratchy tulle. I floated on the dance floor in his arms.

A magical night with underlying innocence captured in a black and
white portrait of us, caught in a flashbulb glare. We would never
be how we looked then, again. Our college years, Vietnam once,
and twice, and all that came after. Our relationship unfinished, for always.

I save my dress and our photo packing them away again, folding the billowing long dress with my memories, wrapping them up in organdy trimmed in fading, wrinkled, French blue velvet ribbons, old and soon falling apart like me. I wonder where his memories are now?

What is in a Hollow Core Door

by Ivis Westheimer

Once, I thought equality was about making money.
With my own income, power automatically would come with it.

In the habit of avoiding conflict unless totally confronted
or jammed in a corner, my anger dwelled well-dampened within.

Finally, I made enough money, shared a home with a man,
and felt equal in my well built shell. Content, I thought.

One evening during an argument, he shoved me out of our bedroom,
locked the door, in a home where I paid half the household expenses.

In response, I picked up a heavy dining room chair and smashed
it against the door, meaning to make a statement. An action not
thought out at all.

The chair went right through the hollow core door. We were both
surprised. Shocked might better describe the feeling.

Smoldering had burst into flame. I stood my ground,
a new position for me. Both of us jolted into a new place,
so unfamiliar we were visitors there.

Anger evaporated with the splintered door, as our fears disappeared
with it. Only a temporary crack in time, but a beginning.

Me without power began to understand
how much I had all the time.

Bio: Ivis Westheimer lives in Houston, Texas where she explores visual observations through text and photography, sometimes using them together. As a museum docent

finding words to invite a person's imagination into a work of art provides inspiration. Her degrees in English Literature and Art History also contribute to her written images.

Cobwebs

by Susan P. Blevins

Returning home with the slanting rays of the sinking sun, the empty house reflected my own empty heart. Loneliness crept over me, and the melancholy evening wrapped itself around me, not in a kindly way, more like molten lava, killing everything in its path, suffocating me, snuffing me out like the stub of an old candle.

Later, draped in heavy darkness, I sat outside on the veranda in the tired moonlight and listened to the sad and distant strains of a solo violin mingling with the song of nocturnal insects, trying to lift my spirits. Erik Satie must have been mourning when he wrote his haunting, doleful music. Was his heart broken too, I wonder? Will tomorrow bring me light and hope? Resurrection?

With the eye of my soul, I perceived dark shadows cast by cobwebs that were not there, a capillary network holding me prisoner of my grief, bound and paralyzed, cast ashore on a dark continent where I had never traveled before.

Musica

by Susan P. Blevins

The quartet I heard today
played out the music in my heart and soul
They played upon my own heartstrings
and gave voice to music unexpressed
inchoate alphabet soup of unformed music
They built a lofty cathedral of soaring harmonies

Mighty chords the pillars
Beethoven the master architect

Musical ornaments the rich carving
here Mozart and Vivaldi excel

Major keys the sunlight streaming in to lift the spirit
as through the rose window of Chartres Cathedral
visited many years ago
transcendental memory vivid still today
feelings of awe and reverence remembered

Minor chords the altar upon which
we willingly sacrifice our egos and material desires
to face at last our own deep sadness
finally accepting that without plunging to the depths
we cannot rise to heights of ineffable ecstasy

The mortar, love, for only love can hold it all together,
unrequited, celestial, yearning for divine love
all-encompassing, unconditional love
love in all its manifestations
Love

Soaring strings lift me ever higher into the
heavenly realms of perfect music
where Santa Cecilia makes harmonies which
eclipse our earth-bound tones

Sic itur ad astra
On wings of song

Dolor

by Susan P. Blevins

Sometimes I lie in bed and try on other lives for size. Last night I tried on yours but it wasn't a good fit, because when I sank into your life I knew I did not want to be you, even though you are strong and healthy.

I must keep trying them on, like old clothes in my closet that may or may not fit me now, some too tight and restraining like a business suit, some too big and loose, paired with shoes I can never fill. The outfits of my insecurity.

Tonight I'll go back to my default life that I once lived long ago, in the fragrant wooded hills outside Rome, as a Benedictine monk, in the monastery at Subiaco, the simple life of *ora et labora*, Balm of Gilead to my anxious soul.

It feels like I have always yearned to be a holy bridge, a bringer of peace, a healer of body and spirit. Peace in the Middle East, why not? Reconcile my parents' brokenness since my accident? It's all I think about in my waking hours.

The cold stone floor before the altar seeps again into my body, and I lie there, arms outstretched as on a cross, listening to the monks chanting as I am initiated into their holy order, saying goodbye with firm conviction to the world of noise and confusion, and pain.

Gently I drift off to sleep, listening with the ear of my soul to those soothing sounds, heart rate slowing, head growing heavy, ready to return the next morning to the loneliness of life as a quadriplegic, truly alive only in my mind and in my aching memory of when I was whole.

Bio: Susan P. Blevins, an ex-pat Brit, lived in Italy for twenty-six years, traveled the world extensively, and has now settled in Houston, Texas, where she is enjoying writing stories based on her travels and adventures. She had a weekly column on food in a European newspaper while living in Rome, and published various articles on gardens and gardening when she lived in northern New Mexico, before moving to Houston. Her passions are classical music, gardening, nature, animals (cats in particular), reading and of course, writing. She has written a journal since she was about nine.

Jealous over art, that's you

by DS Maolalai

god laughs
and the moon is huge tonight,
a big
copper coin
that could pay for the world
or at least the part you walk on—
your girlfriend
who agreed to come over

is busy with her play instead
and that's
ok—
she is doing more
for more people there
than sleeping with you
would accomplish. you are proud of her
even as the moon stretches light
over lonely tree branches
and the fog
gets in the way of cars.

After a long walk in winter without gloves to buy wine

by DS Maolalai

ah
heat
and
scald
and
hot water
pouring
over my
fingers
massaging
your dull life into
torrid flame,
making ready,
after a long walk
through fields
of thick snow
to sit down
warm by the radiator,
pour a glass
of winter's
red wind
see it spill
and curl on the tip,

ready
to type something.

New buildings of Vauxhall

by DS Maolalai

Fighting a hangover
in the two o' clock sun
and walking by the river
having come out of the Tate
to stare across the river
at the new buildings of Vauxhall
like something gray and rotten
that has risen
or been pulled up
from the sea.

There is a sick thing
in the movement of clouds
on all that layered glass
and deep gray
that someone imagined would seem white
like a tooth rotting
in a rotten mouth.

Can't you see how we are all being torn apart
and nothing is allowed to become
beautiful?

tonight

by DS Maolalai

no music plays—
no radio
or record player
or even the dull sound
of headphone speakers. birds
all sleep

tonight,
heads breathing
under their wings
and the cats stay silent
behind bins,
their tails unfluffed
and curling.
and I feel my arm
curl behind you,
listening
to the hum
of drunken snores.
kiss you once
quietly
behind the ear
and go to sleep.

Bio: DS Maolalai recently returned to Ireland after four years away, now spending his days working for a medical supply company and his nights drinking wine. His first collection, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden*, was published in 2016 by the Encircle Press. He has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

You say it's your birthday

by Sean Lause

My birthday candles burn down
like a puny, miniature Rome.
The Old Man is eating my cake again,
all of it, icing to crumb.

He lacks grace, like a giraffe
eating popcorn. Slice after
slice disappears in maw.
He is all eternal hunger.

At last there remains
only my lone first name.

Will he? Jesus! There I go too,
down the bottomless pit.

Does he know what he just did?
Has he read *The Interpretation of Dreams*?
No. He's just a big dumb bear.
He's like nature, bursting with beasts.

So go ahead, world, swallow me
whole, like the Peterwolf's duck,
tied to time's tree, and endless need.
Go ahead. Eat me up.

My magic newlywed neighbors

by Sean Lause

I still have not spoken to them.
I try, but they're gone before my wave.
A magician's act of flowers and mirrors.

The wife appears outside my upstairs window,
laughing, disappears, an invisible bird singing,
then flows out another, dreaming her hair down.

One day, a pink pillow case flaps
its lewd humorous tongue at me, and at night
strange notes leap from the chimney to the moon.

In the morning, the husband exits in a rush,
one shoe half off, then returns, bags
overflowing with wine bottles and celery.

I keep waiting for him to race out a trap
door, his wife levitating over his head
like a balloon, the dark skies lush
with fish and loaves of wonder.

Now and then, dancing, laughing footsteps
ghost up and down the stairs and suddenly
my heart flutters into a dove.

I decide the best applause is silence
when one evening she appears, blue nightgown,
picks up a sliver of bottle with two deft toes,
and spotting me, makes a gentle bow.

Bio: Sean Lause is a professor of English at Rhodes State College in Lima, Ohio. His poems have appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *The Alaska Quarterly*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Pedestal*, *Atlanta Review*, *Illuminations* and *Poetry International*. He has published two books of poetry, *Bestiary of Souls* (FutureCycle Press, 2013) and the upcoming *Wakeful Fathers and Dreaming Sons* (Orchard Street Press).

Forecastings

by Mary K. O'Melveny

Drifting down leaves are usually first
to send messages of change.
One or two lying lazily about, still green
slashed with a bright stripe of gold-red.
Then more arrive, leaving the green behind,
wrinkling quickly in the early chill air.

Cardinals wait in bronzed bushes.
They have bid fond adieus to comrades
more eager for long flights southward.
Some afternoons, awaiting their moment
at the feeders, they could be debutantes
in the wings, hungry for brief spotlights.

Rain has been descending steadily. Now,
as it soaks the culvert, the creek has risen
to a more adult, river-like stature.
The Black-eyed Susans have been tossing
off their yellow namesake petals,
black cones bobbing lonely in the wetness.

Blood Moon arrived and took its leave.
Whitetail rut has begun. We have armored
our tender trees against the passions of racked bucks.

Wispy shadows of suicidal deer
ring twilight roadsides where they mimic
whispered, wraithlike glows of spider's webs.

Humble acorns begin their temptations
of squirrels who sense stark shifts
in shapes of daylight. Simple shelter
beckons. No more brazen darting about
as if tree limbs were playground jungle gyms.
Now they are playthings for coyotes and hawks.

The truest tales of transitions are told
by my stately Great Blue Heron.
Each day, she stands serene

at the edges of the old reservoir.
Then, a sudden dunk in rippled water
and she soars high, glides above the creek.

Beak to feet, she curves like a graceful
letter S—a feathery yoga pose—
a glissade amidst marshy waters,
fish and frogs her wary audience. Ducks
alight and depart like stagehands.
But when she exits, winter holds the stage.

Winter Wonders

by Mary K. O'Melveny

Juncos and chickadees in the lilac bush
sit as quietly as holiday ornaments.
I peer in closely. Suddenly,
they are everywhere, flitting
and fluttering as they wait their turn
at the feeders on the deck below.

Shape-shifting snow decorates us.
The stopbreath cold air
could crush a heart in an instant.
I pour out more birdseed. My aching

hands feel as if my gloves
had been dipped in ice blocks.

Random footprints rest lightly
on the meadow, a wintry puzzle
with no point of exit or entry.
They hint at survival stories
we may have overlooked.
Or, ghosts of springtime lost.

We take a short walk, bundled up like
precious goods so we won't break apart
if we fall into snowbanks or slide
on shadowed patches of ice.
Even a walk up the driveway exhausts,
as if we had arrived at base camp Everest.

We find our sturdy mailboxes sheared
and scattered sideways, as though lumberjacks
blazed a first trail down our county road.
These days, it seems like everyone wields
a sharp blade, our junk mail just one
among many hapless targets.

At woods' edge, trees list and lean,
suspended in place like frozen matchsticks.
Only the firewood's bright blue tarp
distinguishes it from mounds of mulch
or frost-glazed piles of glacial rock.
Even the deer have gone into hiding.

At the creek, ducks swim lazily, floating
past blocks of white as if they were
reflected clouds on some lovely summer day.
Optimism beckons. Imagining warmth there,
we throw off mittens, vests and woolen hats.
Heat arrives in a smoldering kiss.

The Reincarnation of Flight

In Loving Memory

by Mary K. O'Melveny

There is an afterlife to each of our losses
that often lies in wait, catching us up, off
our game, tears mostly dried, though they can rise up
anytime, it seems. Soar past. Fly low.

Today, when I looked out my window, she was there.
Wings spread, feathered claws, golden eyes open,
whiter than the snowy yard, bits of brown and black
thrown in like modest afterthoughts.

I knew her right away. She sat calmly on the ground,
blinking as she searched for signs of life beneath
frozen layered grasses and February winds.
Arctic summers may have been on her mind.

She watched me gather up my thoughts, waited for
the sound of her name to leave my surprised mouth.
Too soon, she rose high over the meadow.
I watched her ascend, in all of her new glory.

I was not eager to wave her on but I knew her nomadic ways.
She was never good as a captive audience.
This new flight path was filled with grace.
Not like her last, dark leap away from the gray subway platform.

As Winter Comes

by Mary K. O'Melveny

As winter comes, everything looks tired out.
Orchards lean over from the weight
of apples long picked. A patch of peeling
paint curls up under the eaves.
Rust climbs like unruly ivy toward
darkened door handles of an old truck.
Mud splattered rubber tires thin down

in piles near the barn door as if
waiting for a ride that never arrives.

As winter comes, grey blue skies shiver
while leaves fling themselves to ground.
Even the sun becomes ancient icon, its sheen
dimmed back, its light speckled and opaque.
A slight hint of coppery red threads
the tree line as though a reminder of
lost youth will cheer us as we brace
ourselves for primordial days ahead.

This is the time of year I want to be a wolf.
My silvery fur caressing wind as I roam
Yellowstone's snowy ravines, magpies
and ravens following my snowy footprints.
They will dance in air, then land like dominoes
on frosted ground to watch and wait for me
as I traverse through chilled early light.
Like me, they will hope, as winter comes,
that deaths ahead will not be our own.

To Be Blessed

by Mary K. O'Melveny

To be blessed, I always thought,
was like being able to walk on water.
A miracle of positive thinking.

Safe while everyone around you sinks
or falters, arms and legs thrashing like cymbals,
while you still hear the sun's bright orchestral chords.

To be *blessed*, on the other hand,
was what the sales clerk said about the day she urged you to have
after she wrapped your holiday gifts and tied their bows.

To be blessed was to have your best friend of 45 years
remember your name again as you walk with her
through once lovingly planted lush gardens.

I can still see her lavender and lupine,
laurel and lobelia. I shade my eyes against
the shine of orange coi darting past lotus blossoms.

To be blessed is to see two eagles nesting in a treetop
as I drive home from running dull errands,
listening to radio chatter about terrifying times to come.

To be blessed is to listen to Miles Davis
Kind of Blue and *Sketches of Spain*
offer reveries of calm and cool.

To be blessed is knowing that even the fierce rage
that fills my body like fluid fire climbing up wooden walls
might be tamped down if I took a walk in my woods

past our stream and its little waterfall.
As my boots kick leaves away, I head for the pond
where I will think about walking on water.

Bio: Mary K. O'Melveny is a retired labor rights lawyer and "emerging" poet. Mary lives in Washington, DC and Woodstock, NY. Her work has been published in various online and print journals including *The Write Place at the Write Time*, GFT Press, *Into the Void* and *The Offbeat* as well as blog sites such as *Writing in a Woman's Voice* and *Women at Woodstock*. Mary's poem, "Cease Fire," won First Prize in the 2017 Raynes Poetry Competition sponsored by *Jewish Currents Magazine* and appears in the anthology, *Borders and Boundaries* published by Blue Threads Press. Her poetry chapbook, *A Woman of a Certain Age* will be published in September 2018 by Finishing Line Press.

Breathing Bread

by Cheryl Sommese

They appeared impatiently uplifted
In their First Communion
attire,
adults leading the way
while diminutive feet
awkwardly trailed
like goslings

eagerly anticipating
their first
life-sustaining meal.

A 7-year-old silhouette in a white chiffon dress
and delicate veil
surfaced—
Straight legs peeking below the lacy apparel,
unaware her bony ribs
would come to part three years later
like Moses dividing
the Red Sea.
A repaired heart hole inadvertently instigating an increasingly
twisted spine
so that straight legs would come to bow
and some of the
parted ribs
removed
25 years after that.

Missteps occurred in that fleeting period,
pathways flooded as youth
passed
with no possibility
of return.

The priest called out, “Cheryl,”
and a dark-haired girl
arose.

Immediately shaken,
wondering if an alternate universe
really did allow redo’s,
the patched heart
began pounding.

But Cheryl returned to her seat,
her adult silhouette,
and her grownup body.
Glancing beyond centuries of institutional missteps
far graver than

her own,
she crossed over enslaving
personal thoughts
to reach
the life-sustaining meal:
one that always nourished her,
at least until the
next time.

Bio: Cheryl is a creative writer and freelance ghost writer. Several of her short stories and poems have been featured in various print and online publications. Animals hold an especially favored place in her heart, and she greatly misses her beloved dog, Rosie, who passed away two years ago. She considers an evening glass of Chianti or Cotes du Rhone wine one of life's indelible pleasures and resides with her husband, Don, and dog, Bella, in New Hampshire.

Swimming Hole on the Russian River

by Laura Hampton

Bare feet up stony dirt
Scrabble over boulders
Summit the cliff
I take a breath, then
Reckless, eyes shut
Falling, flying
Shoot deep down through clear cold water
Toes touch silty bottom.

Again, I climb,
Knowing how my stomach will lurch
But jumping anyway.
A moment of panicked rapture:
Freefall,
Then dropping like an anchor into
A liquid cushion.
Swimming up against mica flecked walls
Sun shafted river water.

The older boys, who are
Working up the courage
Hoot as I surface. Hats off to me.
“You’ve got guts for a little girl.”

I look at their bare shoulders
Wet hair, muscled arms
See admiration in their eyes.
And I grin shy.

I didn’t know: I had guts.
I didn’t know I could get those kinds of looks.
A deep pool below
Just a kid, jumping off a cliff.
Just a girl, plunging off a precipice.

Family Reunion *(note that line length is slightly altered due to spacing restrictions)*

by Laura Hampton

It starts like most family reunions, especially here in the South:
Potato Salad, sheet cake, teenagers pilfering beers.
Exclamations, “You’ve got the Orr nose,” or “You’ve got Aunt Ginny’s eyes.”
We spend the day sun-screened, bobbing in the lake,
Teasing out genealogy, swapping out stories.

Come sunset, we build a campfire,
Roast marshmallows, eat s’mores, fingers sticky and tongues burnt.
Then the bluegrass relatives pull out their instruments.
The stars come out as they play.
The youngest children begin to dance.

Little bodies whirling, stamping in the dirt.
Before long, adults stand, clapping out the beat.
Hips begin to sway, feet step side to side, heads nod.
The night deepens, another log on the fire.
Two sisters take hands and spin, laughing, just in the shadows.

Soon anyone who can stand is on their feet, and moving.
We even swirl Uncle Jiff’s wheelchair in circles.
A primeval urge of beat and firelight takes us all up.

Our clan, these familiar noses and eyes reflecting the flickering embers.
Coalesce with the larger tribe, who for eons, dances by the fire.

Bio: Laura Hampton lives in Houston, Texas. She has had numerous poems, short fiction and nonfiction pieces published in both print and digital publications. In addition to writing, she is a Master Instructor of Pilates.

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