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"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 Nobelist's 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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