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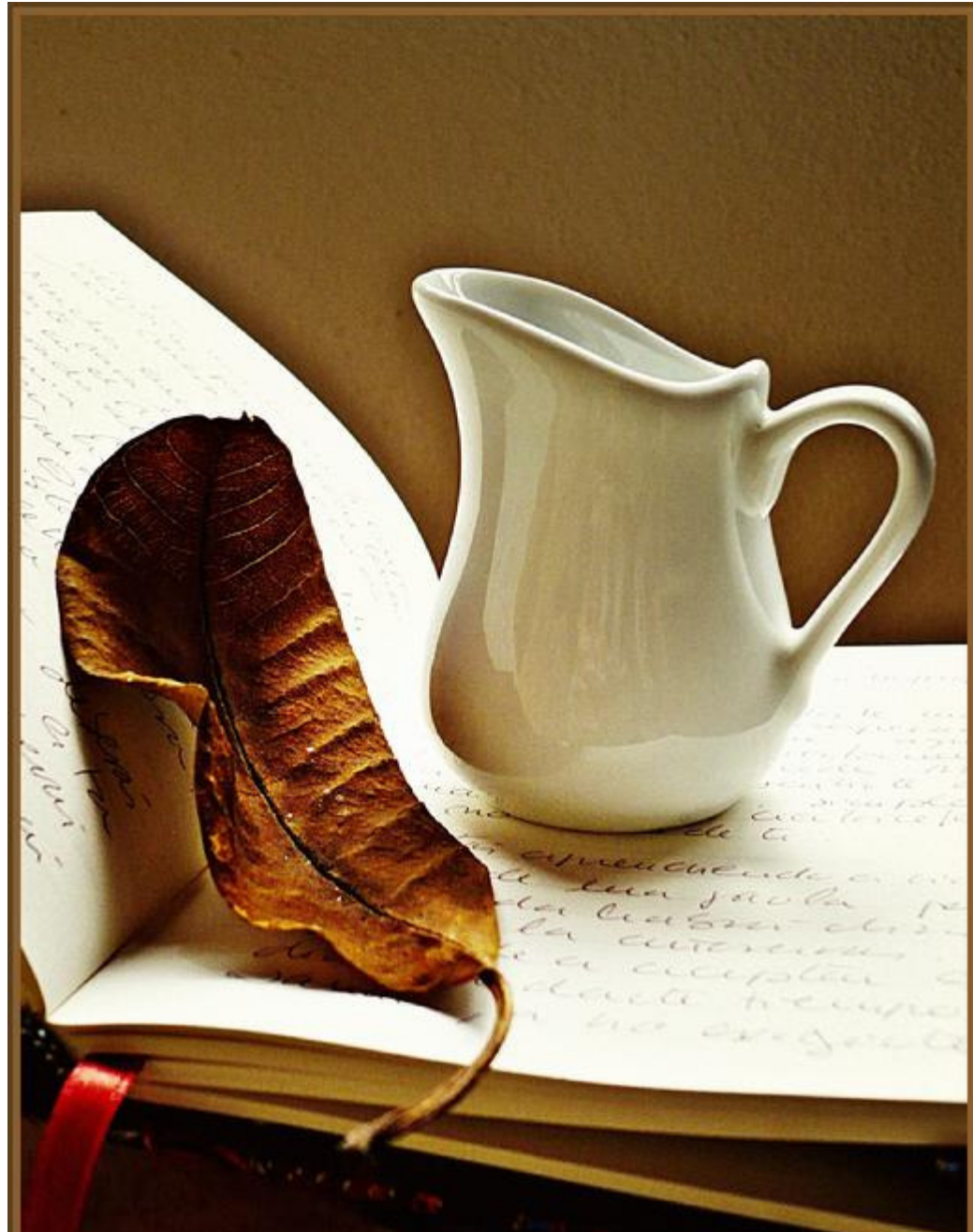
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"The Complex Simplicity of Joy" by Zenaida Toledo; <http://myhealingmoments.blogspot.com/>

## **The Queen**

by Benjamin Schmitt

tangled in her robes  
behold the maiden at night  
black hair flows rivers on pillows  
heart leaps out of her mouth like a toad  
to pursue a fly in the swampy marshes of dreams

we miss her here  
so far from that enchanted tower  
when she paraded through our town square  
with the purple banner of a monarch  
we believed everyone had a queen such as she

but how wrong we were,  
that day resting on an ivory steed  
bespeckled with dark stars, retort  
to evening skies, her eyes captured us all  
with an arcane power only hinted at in lore

I still remember moments  
like alms distributed for every soul  
when she would speak to the water  
in response it would flow according to her wishes  
the plants she touched would grow to be nine feet tall

she cured our diseases  
with gaiety, she brought back our crops  
with moments that rewired the universe  
into a new kind of sense  
in our own wretched way we came to expect this

our comfort banished her  
our mystical familiarity abominable  
men would start fights with bears  
because they thought they were protected, women  
would stab themselves in the heart just to make the journey back

the queen offered no protection  
against death, the natural forces of time,  
her magic was extraordinary but with people  
the special becomes commonplace, the rare  
just an occurrence, we long to make the holy convenient for our needs

and so we hounded her  
to be our miracle and our muse  
until she could offer nothing but disappointments  
to the grand occasions of our imaginations  
dismissing her as a sham, we waited for the next queen to arrive

but none other came  
yet some have set up shop  
magicians offering tiny entertainments  
jesters with quick jabs, they would replace a feast  
with junk food, they would run an empire on chocolate cake!

oh how we miss our queen  
we imagine her laughter in the tower  
and her tears, yes, we remember those too  
there was such an honesty that was in that pain  
it was like God looking straight through a mask at you

---

**Benares**

by Minakshi Watts

In Benares,  
Lamps left as prayers float all night  
Into the anticipated embrace of wisdom;  
Mornings come balanced delicately  
On incense smoke and Vedic chants.

Dusty lanes keep many secrets  
Weavers' looms and mystics' songs  
Blend here to dye ambiguously  
Eight yards of dreams with burning pyres.

The weaver looks into Life's eyes  
Here, gazelle-like, she skips  
From bashful brides in brocades to  
Miles of ashes in the winds.

Life plays hide and seek in lanes  
lined with almanacs.

---

### **Snoqualmie Medicine Woman Sings to the Moon**

by Fredrick Zydek

Some say she can talk with birds.  
I'm sure the frogs know her name,  
for none of them bolts when she walks  
among them filling her bowl with herbs.

She knows the secret of every leaf,  
twig, root, bark and blossom growing  
on this side of the mountain. She sings  
them songs spun from a mystery she claims

was born the night the people of the moon

pitched their tents beside the great falls  
and decided to call this planet their home.  
I have seen her dance at the river's edge

wrapped in only a ceremony of words.  
She danced until a single loon lifted  
its feathers in the face of the moon and flew  
into the memory of what stars know of healing.

Only then would she begin her singing.  
The song was always gentle as river moss,  
perfect as a blossom, soft and silvery  
as the moon's sweet reflected light.

---

### **Jesse's Homeless Face**

by Michael Lee Johnson

Someday Jesse wants to go home.  
I see his world,  
all its hidden concepts  
embedded in Jesse's aging face-  
life has whispered by leaving  
memory trails-  
wrinkled forehead,  
deep as river bed ruts  
dried with years, weather-beaten,  
just above his bushy eyebrows  
that are gray and twisted-  
much like life drawing memories  
across his empty face.  
Jesse has a long oblique  
nose with dark  
blue opal eyes,

that would pierce  
even the pain  
of his own crucifixion.  
Life tears flow through  
a whole new ghoulish  
apparition, a vision  
of homelessness plastered  
east of Dearborn Bridge,  
near Lower Wacker Drive,  
downtown Chicago-  
where affluent citizens  
seldom go unless inebriated;  
puke-stained, or in a taxicab.

Jesse's hair sprouts skyward,  
groomed like an abandoned  
dove nest in wild Chicago  
meandering winds.  
Puffed eye bags of weariness  
sag like sandbags,  
one slightly heavier than the other.  
Weeks of bearded growth  
contour his chin in color blends  
of white and black.  
Over one shoulder drapes  
a grungy gray blanket found  
in Lilly Mae's garbage can,  
the other shoulder,  
naked, but tanned,  
bears itself to the elements.

Jesse panhandles during the day.  
At night and early Sunday mornings,  
you can find him behind  
a local McDonalds,

near Cracker Creek,  
sharing leftover burgers  
and sugar candy  
with river rats-  
Jesse considers it an act of religious charity;  
age 69, someday soon,  
Jesse wants to go home.

### **April's flowers**

by Michelle Kennedy

You meticulously tend  
every flower in your garden  
Till the soil, sprinkle nutrients  
into the earth  
giving your time and attention  
even to the weeds which seek  
to destroy your hard work  
I am in the dark corner with dry soil  
Not even a drop of water you give  
to nourish me  
Abandoned, I wonder  
how you could turn from me  
I watched you grow  
from girl/woman/mother  
Unconditional love I've given  
so you assume I will remain  
planted  
Never leave you  
But you're always too busy for me  
and I am dying  
  
With great effort



I will lift my eyes  
to the sky  
Seek  
a wind of change  
to blow my dry seeds elsewhere  
where it is warm and welcoming  
I will find a new home  
for my tired, unloved roots

### **Son and Heir**

by John Grey

The house is yours.  
The grass grows high,  
the garden's dead.  
You've no will to mow the lawn,  
to tend the roses.  
Your father's never coming home.  
You swallow a mouthful  
from each of his half-drunk liquor bottles.  
Sure, he'll still be wanting them  
but no nurse would ever let them near him.  
You even smoke his cigarettes.  
Another taboo.  
The paper plops upon the lawn.  
You can't decide whether  
to stop delivery  
or comb the classifieds for work.  
And what about the bills  
that clutter the kitchen table?  
Maybe you can sell  
his precious baseball cards.  
Or the football signed by Namath.

Why don't you go see the old devil,  
strapped to IV, to oxygen,  
speech slurred, eyes barely moving.  
You could give him hell  
for abandoning you this way.  
Dishes in the sink, dust on the mantle,  
dirty clothes on the floor.  
The house is yours.  
Is that any way to treat a loving son?

---

### **Life Goes On**

by John Grey

So life goes on  
even if love does not.  
For people must breed,  
so the priest says,  
though in more words.

It's what we live for after all.  
So others can live after us.  
Of course, it's absurd  
but who listens to Inc.

I sit in a neighbor's gun-room  
Sipping coffee.  
It's all in the shape of a visit  
but it's more research on my part.  
How do people who really do  
reproduce themselves exist.  
I'm surprised he has rifles  
on his wall with kids about

but he assures me that none  
of them are loaded.  
The rifles that is, not the kids,  
who make enough noise  
in the yard without the aid of whiskey.

So life is in good shape here,  
according to my priest that is.  
Tom, and Natalie, who's not home,  
are sharing in God's gifts.  
The kids, of course, not the guns,  
none of which have been fired  
in anger in many a long year  
unless a man could get angry with a deer.

He looks out the Window  
to where the kids are playing.  
His face beams.  
Such pride, affection  
of a kind I've never seen  
when he's with Natalie.  
But she's love and love ends.  
And they're life, going on as usual.

---

### **Condominium Number 5**

by John Grey

Look at their faces, so proud to say  
the glass table is imitation Knoll and  
the clocks are Mangiarotti knock-offs.  
Their words are easy to please art-critics:  
prints on every wall and a silver goblet  
that could be Desny from a distance.

Out comes a coffee piazza, as proud as  
the brew is hot, shiny cups that refer back  
to a classical order or two.  
I'm awkward in other's people's houses now.  
It's not just where to sit, should I use a coaster.  
I feel as if it's their taste I've blundered into,  
good or bad, and I don't belong here.  
Our furniture has no ambition.  
Theirs is Danish wannabes.  
Our carpet stains are potted histories of good times.  
Any laughs in the oriental weave beneath our feet  
were surely chuckled by some long dead emperor.  
Once a house meant nothing to me.  
It was just a way to get to the people.  
But there's more and more invitations  
these days from the right sort of clientele.  
They live in the shadow of what they'd do  
if they had real money.  
They have no children though to them  
the stoneware jug copied after  
Reimerschmid is a child.  
It was made for bearing water  
that replicate of blood.

---

**Earl**

by Vince Corvaia

When I called home  
from the movie theater  
to say I'd be there soon

my father told me  
his friend Earl Heath

was dead.

Earl, jolly  
business partner  
who with his wife Claire

came back from New Orleans  
with all kinds of stories  
about the French Quarter

and meeting Al Hirt,  
and taking the trolley to cemeteries  
like small cities,

dead from a heart attack,  
“just like that.”

My father sounded scared  
for the first time  
in our young lives,

as if Death  
had found his community  
and was closing in.

But it would take  
thirty years more  
for the gun to load,

the muzzle planted firmly  
in his mouth,  
my father the last person

I would have expected  
to help pave the way  
for what he feared most.

---

**Benediction**

by Vince Corvaia

This poem is a yellow cup.  
Pour yourself inside

and watch yourself  
conform to its shape.

Don't be afraid.  
No one will drink you.

But I should tell you  
about the slow leak

near the bottom  
from a hole

the size of a second thought.  
Don't be afraid.

Here is the chance  
to live your life

one drop at a time,  
to love your life

one sacred drop at a time.

---

**Finitudes**

by Anne Whitehouse

## I

Leaves fall like confetti. In gusts,  
they twist and turn. The hawkbill geranium  
we planted in July is still blooming in October,  
each tendril ending in a violet flower.  
Low to the ground, nodding softly  
in the wind, it never seems to struggle.

## II

Under a weightless rain,  
in dress uniforms of dark blue,  
the firemen marched in solemn step  
to the mournful accompaniment  
of the "Emerald Society Pipes and Drums."  
Wreaths were laid at the monument,  
and a bell struck for every man lost  
in the last year.

Our dead are always with us,  
not only at anniversaries.  
They keep watch over us,  
they chide and encourage us,  
if we let them.

## III

It was a day like any other day,  
the mist hung low to the ground  
and hid the hills.  
The wind blew and the rain spilled,  
and the sun broke through.  
And the wet grass waved,  
as majestic clouds floated past,  
like time, hurrying

in one direction.

IV

The migrating bird that can't keep up  
gets left behind.

Bathe me in golden light,  
heal my shattered bones.

---

**Exquisite Pain**

by Leeanne Meredith Oschmanns

*In memory of James Bulger and all lost babies*

A crystal tear  
Coldly shattered  
Against rock hard reality  
Of thwarted dreams

A million shards of light  
Spinning from a shattered core  
None bright enough  
To light the way beyond  
Deep and endless pain

In place of light and laughter  
And growth's journey  
Toward manhood  
Nothing...nothing

As the seasons march  
Hair turns silver  
Memories dim and images fade



Save one bright and clear  
Tiny shard etched in my Soul

Your cherub face  
Tucked away  
In fetal slumber

In that dark  
Warm nurturing space  
Where you dwell  
Deep within  
The chambers of my broken heart

Your tiny handprint  
Etched forever  
Shining brightly to the end  
Wait there my love  
Until we meet again...

---

### **Navigating A Life**

by C. Michelle Olson

Mapping a life, there are things I can not decide  
The element of surprise takes hold  
Strides of years hurrying by  
Why was I at this delicate time left alone  
Not sure of where to go  
Lost at sea  
Feeling no control, the dreams I've dreamt kept on hold  
Searching for a sign to calm the mind  
I am like the lost treasure needing to be found  
Sometimes in life, signs are easily missed  
Fear tries to compete

An enemy one must vanquish  
In a starry, blackened humid night  
A lighthouse shines down an intense beam  
Navigating a life on an unchartered course,  
finally the sign catches my eye  
Steering clear of danger ahead  
Pushing aside the waves I make  
It is the notion to continue moving forward  
There are still unseen tides I have to face  
But with cleared vision from the light  
I embrace what awaits  
I am learning to navigate a life

### **The Summer of 1982**

by Michael Ceraolo

The summer of 1982  
I was twenty-four,  
                  and  
my first real love and I  
had broken up a few months earlier  
(involuntarily,  
                  on my part;  
I had fantasies of bucking parental disapproval  
a la Romeo and Juliet,  
                                  without the tragic ending,  
  but  
she wasn't similarly willing,  
                                  or able,  
  so  
she will go unnamed here and forever more)  
I was still working as a restaurant manager  
on Lakeshore Boulevard

about a mile west of where the creek enters the lake,  
across the street from the main gate of the amusement park  
that had died a deserved death over a decade earlier  
The job wasn't particularly suited to my talents,  
but  
the schedule was conducive to being out every night;  
and  
at that time of my life with a failed love affair behind me,  
that was more important  
The road of excess may or may not  
have been leading to the palace of wisdom,  
but  
it was soon to lead me somewhere different  
Because  
on those long nights out we would talk books and sports,  
and one of the books we talked about  
was John Irving's *The World According to Garp*,  
which  
I had picked up in a paperback edition  
one late night at the local convenience store  
(in those days literary fiction was still sold  
in mass-market paperback size,  
and  
sold in many places in addition to bookstores,  
which were themselves plentiful),  
and  
the excellence of the book caused me  
to search for and find Irving's earlier novels,  
and  
created even more anticipation for the movie version  
that would be released at the end of July  
One of my buddies was an aspiring writer,  
and  
we saw the movie together around the beginning of August,  
and the road I was on became clear:

I had always had a vague ambition to be a writer,  
but  
had never been sufficiently moved to actually put pen to paper  
I didn't think that I could create characters  
compelling enough to sustain a novel,  
or even a short story,  
but  
I had always liked poetry despite how it was taught  
(and Irving even interspersed a number  
of Donald Justice's poems throughout the book),  
and  
after seeing the movie I went home and wrote two poems,  
mediocre efforts now thankfully lost,  
but  
the third poem I wrote I felt was a keeper;  
it found a loving publication home two years later  
And,  
for better or worse,  
I have been writing ever since---

### **Capital Worth**

by Cheryl Sommese

I know the prodigal, she lived here once.  
The surrounding world was obscure to her:  
poverty,  
an odor that stunk elsewhere,  
and war:  
an unfortunate but only casual smell.

She left a while back,  
and mostly I am pleased.  
Her scent became increasingly stale

as the morning sun bared its radiance  
expecting depth to shine  
on.

Occasionally she stops to visit  
but I confine her to the doorstep.  
And except for momentary chatter  
about this neckpiece  
or that purse,  
I bid her farewell.

---

### **Lost in the City**

by Cheryl Sommese

Perhaps he was meant for the damp streets that snare youth  
and hold idealistic notions hostage.  
Wandering from avenue to avenue in search of a heat grate  
that could temporarily warm his goose bump legs,  
affording him  
a glimpse into paradise  
equipped with a temperature system  
that could lavishly  
be turned up and down at whim.

After all, he rarely did anything in a conventional manner,  
following rules like a headstrong child darting  
in and out of traffic.  
Filled with a multitude of aspirations until reality overpowered naivety,  
then inhaling anguish like  
a desperate mother breathing in the smells of her lost child's belongings,  
frantically replaying even benign decisions  
over and over.

But he was beyond that now  
abandoning the hope of anything more promising.  
Living in corners and spaces where food may  
or may not come.  
Envyng those judicious enough to submit to other people's rules,  
securing cushy spots  
in life's circle  
outfitted with sheets and even soft blankets.

---

### **North**

by Philip Fleisher

Driving north between pines  
I feel a presence.  
Rocks and stones lie scattered  
Like open books  
Each one whispering a word as I pass by.  
My car is a spider  
Traveling the length of a black thread.  
Houses sit back among trees  
Table lamps burn throughout the night  
Against the shadows  
That approach without warning.  
Satellite dishes rotate in back-yards;  
Huge metallic flowers  
Seeding the galaxies across time.  
A meadow unfolds before me  
Like a pair of wings  
As I climb the curve of the earth  
The moon peers down  
Wearing the white mask of the bee-keeper.  
He has come close once again.

This weathered old gardener  
Who smiles at us like  
We were his children.

### **Yard Work**

by Peter Franklin

It was my father  
who taught me how to rake leaves,  
pick up all the trimmings...bear the burden of the clean up crew.

I actually had no choice...  
for I was the go-to guy once dad did his halftime clear- cutting of the back  
yard.  
I always knew the call would come...hey, give me a hand.

It was nice for a moment  
to think that I had a choice...though he quickly disappeared to the grotto-  
comfort  
of the worn green Naugahyde sofa in the family room...second half nearly  
underway.

So I labored, sweated under the late afternoon sun, never thinking to tell  
him  
that the hay fever made my eyes and nose and throat miserable.  
But that would have accomplished nothing,

save for only prolonging the inevitable.  
I bore it well, I think...  
Much like my love for you.

### **The Limner**

by Denise Bouchard

An afternoon in May  
The tulips are in bloom  
Amidst great works of Art  
She holds sway

A bright crimson flower  
In the center of a garden room  
Enchantment fills the air  
Harps are playing, the music  
seemingly  
Coming from the trees

I watch as she magically brings  
like-minded souls together  
with ease

In her photographs are glimpses of  
doors  
Of ancient places, where I yearn to  
roam  
The smell of frankincense fills her  
tent  
She's an alchemist turning dross  
into gold

A question is put to her "What is a  
limner?"  
And she replies, "Someone who  
illuminates from within."

My head spins with symbols of  
mermaids, golden eggs,  
Apothecarist bowls  
Beautiful mermaid's eyes stare



back at me  
Windows of the soul  
And so it begins...

An invitation to her home follows  
all so surreal  
Gray viney arbors entangle with a  
large pergola  
Its corner a home to cooing  
mourning doves  
Holds a constellation of lilacs,  
Casting purple shadows in the dusk  
Below as above

Stone goddesses and angels  
Weave their spell

Strangers, but we pour out our  
hearts  
As the wine flows,  
And the angels smile

Her bedroom, a church of stained-glass  
And the evidence of a miracle of  
her own manifestation  
Hangs on the wall

Rumi on the bedside table  
Ancient Persian philosopher  
Still a guide to us all

The old world European kitchen  
Thick crockery sits on open  
shelving  
With a cafe window from floor to  
ceiling

Looks out upon the magical arbor  
Where her pink stuccoed studio sits

She bids us enter the studio  
A peak into another dimension

I pass stairways lined with  
mandolins  
I spy dwarf shoes on my  
ascension

The look and smell of her tools  
intoxicates  
A round table in the center

The stained-glass windows create a  
soft, rosy glow  
In the setting sun

More mandolins and guitars on the  
wall  
Awaiting their illumination,  
Will their music be sweeter when  
done?

Such visions of another universe,  
A place beyond time  
More ancient doors on the walls  
open to me  
I'm in Europa, walking in fields of  
lavender  
Grapes abundant on the vines

We come back to the arbor  
The enchanted center  
And the talk grows deep

Scathing truths are revealed on this  
night

Of how we were the mermaids once  
With our enchanting green eyes,  
our thick and lustrous hair  
Of the men who loved us, the  
women who hated us  
And how even male strangers still  
treat us with care  
And how both the lack of gifts given  
and those which were received  
Brought us here

In the ensuing days, I feel lifted and  
buoyant,  
As though I was shown a different  
way to be

Why do I feel so light

It's because I was a mermaid once  
And I have met a limner  
Who, by reminding me of this,  
Has illuminated  
Me  
From within

---

### **Ambition Never Sleeps**

by Nicole M. Bouchard

It's a burning hunger that keeps me awake at night,  
A restlessness that beats inside against the walls of my mind and body

It's hysterical and dangerous, threatening to take every last bit of me with it

There is a hunger burning hot, a wild blaze of flames set upon a field of ice  
The fire calls to me day in and day out  
Sometimes it becomes so violent it screams the blood out of my ears

It is a captor who makes demands constantly, same or different, easy or difficult  
Depending on its mood,  
Irreverent to my capacity for withstanding torture

It is almost always leaning close to whisper that it knows and understands  
my wants and needs  
like no one and nothing else in this world  
It looks so much like me that it's hard to ignore, its obsession nearly endless  
And it pretends to own me with such arrogance, if I were any less wise I'd  
believe it

Would that I did not respect and fear it so  
Would that I could keep it quiet, leave it behind, destroy it completely

And it would howl for a time, seeming fatally wounded, only to grow  
stronger and take another shape

It is what drives me for good or ill  
It might save my life or be my end

It claims that it is justified, has paid pain on pain time and again in some  
measure, has been waiting a lifetime- maybe in truth, no time at all and  
pain is subjective

But when I fall, it gains on me, promising empty promises of relief that I  
want to believe, but I feel the ache of disappointment instead, never enough

It is, in part, my very foundation  
The fuel behind every dream, desire, wish and search for the essential  
My golden attribute

The clock ticks on, precious minutes of unfulfilled potential passing by  
Waking moments wasted

And here you ask me whether I would ever give it up?

Why on earth would I want to?

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