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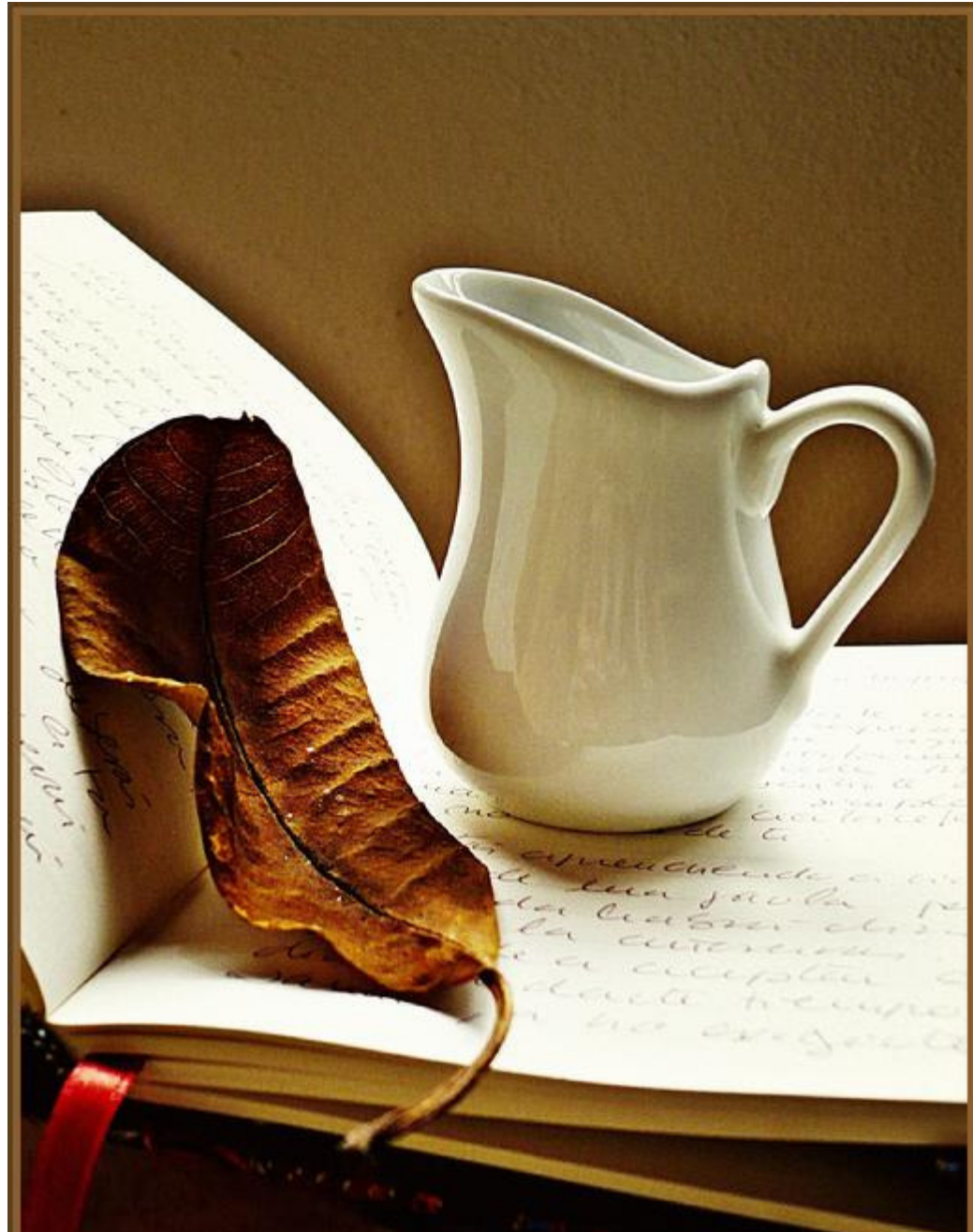
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"The Complex Simplicity of Joy" by Zenaida Toledo; <http://myhealingmoments.blogspot.com/>

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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