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Colleen Whitley

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Poems by Colleen Whitley*

The Dying Leaves

The leaves looked safely dead upon the tree,
Their veins collapsed as those of crucified
Men, or animals, hung up and dried.
Yet when the wind at last shook them free,
I saw a moist and spreading drop still
Flowing from each freshly broken edge.
I watched the leaves, but when I tried to catch
The falling fragments to see if life still
Flowed from them as from their parent, they rattled
Brown-paper edges against grass stiffened
By frost, and shivered as they skipped beyond
My reach. In starting leaps, they scuttled
To the warmth through the open kitchen door,
Where I found them dead on the polished floor.

Apple Trees in Winter

The skeletons of summer stand
In regimented rows,
Feeling twigs and summer sprouts
Frozen where they used to grow.

*To give our readers a broader view of the poetry of one poet, we have printed seven poems on various themes by Colleen Whitley in this issue. Mrs. Whitley, who has an English M.A. from Brigham Young University, now teaches in Ames, Iowa.

Arthur

I sat in mist like this once as a child.
Sir Ector had told me that if a wild
sea bird ever tried to reach the dome of heaven,
he'd crack against it, tumble back, leaving
bloody feathers on the angels' wings and
holes in the clouds. He'd ruffle sea-blown mist and
where he struck the earth, no moss could grow, for
dream-drawn birds who tried to fly too far
would catch their wings in clouds and soon would find
their feathers dampened and their eyes made blind.
I sat by gannet banks along the coast
and waited on moss-clothed rocks for almost
half a day. I watched the watchless ocean play
lick-tag with the cliffs and rolled the clay
beneath the moss-rocks into balls and threw
them at the cliff-devouring sea who
gobbled them. But then the evening mist seeped
in from rocks and sea and sky and slipped
about the rookeries and over me.
And so I went back home. I could not see
the birds along the banks or in the sky;
I couldn't see them leave or land and I
was cold and wet and no more quite convinced
where Heaven was, or what. I've wondered since
whether either men or birds should ever try
to set such sun-soaked goals and fly so high.

Merlin

I was a wise old man
 willow whistles
 But now giddy Guenivere's
 replaced the rhymes and
 his brain. He used to
 tried to tell him, but
 like chanting charms to
 while he does, his thoughts
 I could, and I would
 If he would hear, I
 whole Table will
 spiral staircase
 peasants and the villeins
 and hamlets will
 being burned in a
 witches and the
 from lowly classes
 the rabble, in the
 for the priests and
 But he won't listen.
 I've told him all that I can
 Table and the tactics and
 ruling. I need a
 miss me, probably. Not
 comes to claim crown and
 he'll know. I tried
 before he saw Bellicent,
 he would go see that
 I warned him now, he
 There's no sense in my
 stay and still I would
 he would only come

when he whittled
 watched will-o-the-wisps.
 grown more important and
 runes I settled in
 listen while I
 telling him now is
 children. He'll listen, but
 dance off with her.
 warn him about her.
 would warn him that the
 tumble down her
 someday and the
 from the villages
 come to see a queen
 bone-fire like the
 warlocks who come
 causing trouble in
 restless landless rabble
 for the barons.
 I've stayed here long enough.
 tell about the
 the trickery of
 rest. Besides, he'll never
 me, not till Modred
 kingdom, and then
 to tell him that time, too,
 before the babies, but
 wilful witch. And if
 likely wouldn't listen.
 staying—still I could
 stay to warn him, if
 and ask me to.

The Genealogist

I hear them calling me beyond the years,
 beyond the graves,
 beyond the books and records
 beyond the seeming inexhaustible expanse
 of lives.

Their voices come beyond the half-plowed fields,
 and calling birds
 and wrinkled newspapers
 and papers never read
 and ironed clothes
 and clothes untouched by soap
 and wagon ruts
 and ruts rubbed smooth.

Through all the thousand things of their experience
 and mine,
 They call unerringly.

To Robert Welch

Sing a song of suspects,
 Pockets full of spies,
 Look at all the pinkos
 Right before our eyes.

When the files are opened,
 See them all appear.
 Haven't we such dainty things
 To whisper in your ear?