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In Winter

In winter,
the icy air and falling snow
drive me inside my home
to hide in the warmth
of a wood fire's embrace,
soft lamplight encasing me
in its glow.

A book for company,
I seek comfort in my solitude,
retreating from the hard months
of planting and growing
and harvesting and preserving
my garden's bounty.

Winter for me
is freedom and a patient wait
for the spring to bring back labor
that the earth requires.

In winter,
I find solace and a quieter mind—
a stillness
and time of rest and renewal.

Tabloids

The woman,
whom I had known years before,
accosted me in the grocery store
when she noticed the tabloids
I carried to the checkout lane.
They were for my mother,
who liked reading about the Royal Family
and Hollywood celebrities
and enjoyed working the puzzles inside;
and I loved buying them for her—
a Friday treat
that she looked forward to all week.
The woman said, appalled,
“I can't believe you read that trash!
I'm disappointed in you.”
(I had been her English teacher—
someone who, I guess,
wasn't supposed to read something so low.)
Though her criticism was flung at me,
I sensed an insult to my mother's dignity
and told the woman she should read the tabloids, too,
and learn something she didn't know.
I burst her bubble that day in the grocery store,
dashing any illusions she had about me.
But I didn't want her respect anymore.

My Brother's Garden

How quickly grass covered the plot
where my brother's garden grew,
one he nurtured caringly.
He shared with me some of his bounty—
messes of Blue Lake bush beans,
golden ears of Kandy Korn,
bags of Clemson Spineless okra;
cabbages, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers—
the harvest of his hard work.
In his final garden,
he grew only a few tomatoes.
I should have known then
that something was wrong.
Now that he is gone,
I see the grassy field and remember him
laboring in the sun:
tilling, hoeing, and lifting his baseball cap
to wipe the sweat from his brow,
resting a moment to survey his work,
knowing he had done it well.

Hometown

Near the end of Lent,
the minister needed something to sustain him,
so he went back to his hometown
to visit the old streets and haunts of his boyhood.
He stood at the bank where his mother had worked
and looked through the front window;
and as if the past appeared again,
he saw his mother motion him in
to give him a private tour.
He pondered that when she died—
too soon—
his father was left to raise him then.
He found the movie theater,
one his father had run for years,
and reflected upon the time he spent
sitting in its darkness.
When he came to his childhood home,
he remembered his father's whistle—
a sound as distinct as his name—
that called him in for the evening.
During his return to Shelby,
he realized that things weren't the same:
the stores had changed,
loved ones were gone,
and new people lived in his family's home.
Yet somehow to be there allowed him to see
the light of Easter in the dusk of Lent.
All that he had known before—
beckoned back in his memory—
gave him the strength to carry on.