

# Descent

Jeanne Emmons

It happens when I am on the verge  
of sleep, that death in life we must  
succumb to nightly. I'd imagined  
a down staircase like the one  
that opened up in the bedroom of  
those twelve princesses. Every midnight  
they descended underground to dance  
with their handsome partners in the dark  
castle, then climbed back up again  
at dawn, leaving their shoes in tidy  
threadbare pairs beside their beds.  
But there's only one of me,  
and I have no ballet flats,  
only sensible dream-sneakers  
and the floppy hat of insomnia  
always trying to fly off in the night wind.

Behind my eyelids the familiar purple  
paisleys start to swim and plunge,  
then elevator doors whump open,  
and I step into absolute darkness,  
no LL, G, B, no lighted button,  
no raised star, no Braille, just  
the sound of the doors meeting  
and a sudden, stomach-dropping  
descent into deeper darkness, cold,  
and somewhere a winch whines  
and something clanks and then  
the squeak and high squeal of braking  
and the clunk of the doors opening.  
And my eyes need time to adjust  
to the light of dreams by which  
I hope to find you gliding lithe,  
among the stalwart trunks and  
shushing of the crepe myrtle trees.