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.