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Inside the Circle

I'm frightened even during the day now.
The snow-globe picture I live in
peels back from the edges.

As I take my afternoon walk,
the tree branches curve around
my sky and point black knives
at my heart. This bubble I have made
is still safe. But the outside
always wants to become the inside.
After all, they are not so different from us.

The way to fight
is not to ignore
or confront directly.
It is rather to keep them
subconsciously in a small part
of your mind.
But what if I embraced them instead?
Would I serve them, or they, me.

It's getting cool enough to think.
The scenery in the globe has changed.
The leaves are turning red.
I feel big things coming.
Black vine-choked water
is rising in me as blood.
And the voice says,
"When you see a crude drawing
of a sun, with four long rays
and four short rays,
you will know it is time to wake."

Don't Look Too Close

In the morning you'll see
my pores you could drive
trains through, the mold
on my shower curtain,
the pimples on my legs.

My first angel's breath
of dawn tastes like shrimp
and the garlic peels
I left in the press.

So tonight we should mate
with the candles.
They'll make us into movie stars.
We'll be things of orange light,
flames inside pumpkins,
things of joy,
of no substance.

New Roman Games

I walk like a coward
into the arena –
shoulders hunched, head bent –
but it is only a ploy.
I will survive this.

We wait our turn
behind a cracked
and thorny wooden door.
I peer through
to see winged lions
sprouting fire
from their flanks.
They are gorging
on contestants.
The crowd howls
its approval
in a unified voice.

The door creaks open,
and at once,
they are upon me.
My sword slashes
the creature's mouth.
I slip behind my friend,
and he is taken.
I use a young woman
as a shield
against another.
A third leaps at me,
but my sword
has pierced its heart.

The crowd goes silent
before rising as one.

My gaze finds the replay
screen in the bleachers.
I am the only contestant left.
The emperor's thumb
points to the sky.
I am now a millionaire:
women, my own show,
a brand new car!

Vanessa Kittle has a new collection of poetry, *Apart*, published recently by March Street Press. Her work has recently been published in *Nerve Cowboy*, *Limestone*, *Ibbetson Street*, and *Porcupine Literary Arts*.

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