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DEDICATION

It is Christmas time, par excellence the religious holiday, and this issue is dedicated to all those people who fight against religious beliefs which are so often tools for oligarchic supremacy, oppression, persecution, social injustice, and death. Religious beliefs which are an insufferable scourge when they are forced upon people and become laws used to control a country. This issue is especially dedicated to all the Iranian women who are now fighting for freedom. The Middle Ages are over!

*Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number!
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you:
Ye are many—they are few!*

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Masque of Anarchy*

PAHOA BOY
~ A Poem by Joe Balaz~

A Clarence "Pahoa Boy" Melendez
wuz da bull of his town
growing up on da Big Island.

He had all kine aspirations

but nobody could even imagine
dat he would go as far as he wen go.

Now he lives
in wun new house in Avon

wit his beautiful wife
dat he wen meet in Chagrin Falls.

Unreal his story

like someting dat you would see
in wun movie.

Da seed foa his potential wuz planted
as wun sophomore in high school

wen he wen move
to live wit his Aunty Clara in Kamuela

so he could play football
at Hawai'i Prep.

It wuz all up from deah
and tings wen climb even higher

wen as wun senior

wun college recruiter
wen show up from Colorado

and offered him
wun athletic scholarship

to play on da gridiron foa da Buffaloes.

He developed

into wun pretty good offensive lineman

and he had wun great playing career
in Boulder

to go along wit his degree in Education.

Da real cherry on top of da cake dough

came wen he wuz drafted
in da third round

and given da opportunity
to play pro football.

Next ting you know
he wuz flying on wun jet airliner

and landing
at Hopkins International Airport.

Talk about wun whirlwind

cause he wuz suddenly
wearing wun orange helmet

and he found himself
on wun practice field in Berea.

Long story short he made da team
and managed to give wun solid effort

in his first few years
wit da organization

so he wen really make out
wen his new contract wuz negotiated.

He ended up signing
wun multimillion dollah deal

to continue to play
foa da Cleveland Browns.

Clarence “Pahoa Boy” Melende—

He sure wen go wun long way
from da Big Island.

It really wuzn’t dat long ago

wen he wuz hanging out
wit all da braddahs

at Isaac Hale Beach Park.

ALMANAC 26-30
~ A Poetic Sequence by Christopher Barnes ~

26

Safekeeping is an overstep.
Petal vases tingle regret.
There are no unlit backstairs.
In the bosom of your sanitorium
It's always fun and games.

27

Humour this impulsive view.
Sluices embody diversion.
Misfired punt reduces to tittle.
Earth's far-flung, remote.
Nebulous haar
Will launch your blindness.

28

Sweat for bucket-drop wages.
Hollow out civility to kingpin.
Window-shop enjoyable nibbles.
Verify a griped demeanour.
You'll get used to sleeping in the car park.

29

Frame sward to ideal.
Ditch upended weeds.
Bow over vital seedbeds.
Hope for a mayhem of garishness.
Cruel sun will incinerate your efforts.

30

Excessively prompt alarm.
Tangled dreams pale.
An uncovered sole numbs.
Sour mist
Provokes tormenting day.

ARTEMIS
~ A Poetic Sequence by Patrick Gasperini ~

MEETING ARTEMIS

She walked across the mystical foyer,
A forest of legs, bracelets, beads, and wrought-iron lamps,
Smoke and fractal fragrances, between the acts,
Othello premiere on a Sunday night,
In her blood-red minidress and high heels,
Strutting into the theatre bar like a priestess,
Perhaps a sacred lancet, gold-eyed and sapphire-haired,
Tattooed antelope, while I was draining my late-night drink:
She sat down by me and crossed her legs and asked,
“Am I the first woman you’ve fallen in love with?”

*

ARTEMIS AT THE GYM

Olympus is not a mountain, but a princely mansion,
A gymnasium for nymphs, gods, dukes, and queens,
In the leafy neighbourhood of a coastal city.

“This is a golden ticket for a trial class,
Please visit us at your convenience.”

And when I turned up after my lunch break,
She welcomed me, brass tights and brassiere,
A whip and daggers hanging from her belt,
A chain collar around her neck and a nail in her navel.

“Come with me, there’s a secret room down the corridor,
And if you’re meek enough, I’ll show you what I can do
With my whip and daggers, boots and chains,
And I’ll let you worship my war tattoo upon my foot,
Which I but reveal to those who are about to die!”

Instead of bushes, meadows, twittering silence,
Only tall shelves full of gloves, T-shirts, socks, and compasses;
Her hair floating in the static breeze,
In latex leotard, Artemis was riding a symbolic bike,
While a suntanned Adonis was handing out flyers to passers-by:

*OLYMPUS GYMNASIUM
WOULD YOU LIKE TO BECOME A GOD?
OPEN 24 HOURS
FROM NOW TILL THE END OF THE WORLD:
JOIN US!*

From behind a plastic olive tree,
A new Tiresias was watching her;
He thought she was naked although she was not,
For he could feel every electric impulse crossing her muscles
And read her innermost doubts and anxieties.

“O! I do not care much about *if* or *when* or *why*,
About rules, logic, what is right, what is wrong,
Because there is nothing beyond your lashes now,
Your lips moving, your legs, belly, breasts, neck,

Your perspiration, as sharp as a gladius, uncompromised,
Spring splinters, a tinkling rill down your back, untainted rift.

“Can you feel my hands tearing your soul to shreds,
Slowly, layer by layer, like a worn-out nightdress,
To seize the paleness of your spiritual intimacy?
As long as they last, these moments are immaculate,
Meaningful, gleaming, and forever good.”

*

DATING ARTEMIS

When he first saw her, he thought she was a Hollywood angel
Fallen all of a sudden from the clouds into his bed
While speeding across the sky in her white Rolls Royce
Because of a fierce paradisal storm.
Although her eyes were mountain ponds, unfathomable,
Her soul impalpable crystal, clear, transparent,
Hoarfrost on a balustrade, on the doorsteps at dawn—
She was not the woman he thought she was.

She was a snow leopard on the prowl,
Merciless, implacable, voracious,
A hunting knife, a howling night:
Her lips like fangs could rip his chest apart
And pick his heart out and throw it away,
Like a mutilated toy, a rotten apple.

Beware! Dating Artemis is a fatal act,
Challenging Achilles to a duel at sunrise in Hyde Park.

*

ARTEMIS ON THE BEACH

Artemis does not spend her summers in the woods,
Hunting hares and wrestling with satyrs and wild pigs,
Oh no! She is quite an eccentric goddess,
And lies on the beach in her multicoloured bikinis,
Which have far deeper meanings than a Rimbaud sonnet:

In white, she is an ivory sword on a windowsill,
Unreachable idol on a chair of ice;
In yellow, a sunflower field, Van Gogh's vision;
In pink, a rose garden on fire in early June,
Lolita on her first day at high school;
In green, an emerald mantis, sugary poison on her lips,
Blowing ripples in a stiff pond;
In blue, Venus stepping out of a silken sphere;
In black, a panther roaring in a moonless close,
Dark dreams, unspoken secrets, overwhelming pangs;
In red, a tropical flood, eruption,
Nothing else than Satan's fiery fangs,
Forever burning bright in my bed all night ...

[*Artemis* has already appeared in *Post-Urban Songs*, 2nd Edition, 2021.]

FOUR POEMS by Michael Lee Johnson

*

DEEP IN MY COUCH

Deep in my couch
of magnetic dust,
I am a bearded old man.
I pull out my last bundle
of memories beneath
my pillow for review.
What is left, old man,
cry solo in the dark.
Here is a small treasure chest
of crude diamonds, a glimpse
of white gold, charcoal,
fingers dipped in black tar.
I am a temple of worship with trinket dreams,
a tea kettle whistling ex-lovers boiling inside.
At dawn, shove them under, let me work.
We are all passengers traveling
on that train of the past—
senses, sins, errors, or omissions
deep in that couch.

*

NIGHT LIFE JUNGLE BEAT, BAR NEXT DOOR

Like all thing's life changes, its melodies fragment.
It breaks pieces apart, then they drift, then shatter.
The singers of songs love bars,
naked bodies, consistencies, and inconsistencies
that makes it burn all turn outright at night.
They like to drum repeat rhythms and sounds.
Poets like to retreat to dens
of pleasure just like these.
Sing poets sing off-key
free verse notes down by the bridge,
near the river as far as their voices
will carry them away.
It is the nature of difference,
indifference a vocabulary of us confused,
minds between insanity and genius.
The hermit asks for
a public forum in shyness,
while treading to the bar
next door for a shot of tequila
no money, no life.

*

JESUS AND HOW HE MUST HAVE FELT

Staggering out Wee-Willy's
dumpy dive bar, droopy eyes,
my feelings desensitizing,

confusing my avocado fart,
at 3:20 a.m., with last night
splash on Brut aftershave.
Whispering to my outcast
self-sounding is more like pending death.
My body detaching from myself,
numbed by winter's fingers.
I creak up these outside stairs
to my apartment after an all-night drunk,
cheap Tesco's Windsor Castle
London Dry Gin—on the rocks.
I thought of Jesus
how He must have felt
during His resurrection
dragging His holy body
up that endless stairwell
spiraling toward heaven.

*

POETS IN THE RAIN

All poets are crazy. Listen to them soak
sponge in early rain medley notes sounding off.
Crazy, and suicidal, we know who they are:
Edgar Allan Poe, Sylvia Plath, Dylan Thomas
the drunk, Anne Sexton, Teasdale.
This group grows a Pinocchio nose.
At times I capture you here under control.
I want to inspect you.
All can be found in faith once

now gone in time.

With all your concerns, I see
your eyes layered in shades of green,
confused within you about me.

Forgive me; I'm just a touch
of wild pepper, dry Screaming Eagle
Cabernet Sauvignon, and dying selfishly.

We don't know if it is all worth it.

I have refined my image, and my taste
continues to thrust inside your crevices.

Templates of hell break loose thunder, belches, and anomie.

Asteroid Ceres looks like you are passing gas,
exposes her buttocks, and moves on just like ice
on a balmy rock just like yours.

I will wait centuries, like critics, to review
this fecund body of yours-
soiled, then poppies,
poetry in the rain.

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