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A CHILD'S GUIDE 6
~ A Poetic Sequence by Christopher Barnes ~

BARBIE LAUNCHES MUSTANG

Revolver in unzipped cocktail purse. Nimbostratus peels from moon. Crook left at subway, via rippling elm. White Supremacist congressman thwacks asphalt. Weather Underground bequeath another hit

RAGGEDY ANDY DRESSES DOWN

Sewing machines witter. Dust clots passive air. Hems inch in a flurry, threads unrelenting. Shadowing maroon winceyette bales, blind-cornered. He elevates the wheel-lock, buttonholing sweatshop owner's lung. United People's Front of Nepal have triggered a justified break.

GROUCHY SMURF RASPS WITH BRONCHITIS

Nefarious damp foul-plays wallpaper. In-shreds curtains

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our. Boursin overwhelmed by mould, on cracked saucer.
He groundworks rifle. Slum landlord, due to bang for rent.
Action Directe will not be put upon.

MOOMIN PAPA INCOGNITO AT WEEPING WILLOW

Belgium Minister of State's remains lead funeral
procession. Worms upsurge in drizzle. Our sweetling,
empowered by Communist Combatant Cell, bumps up
Gatling. Overlords nosedive. Limo wrecks hearse. Ether
swirls.

RAG DOLLY ANNA TRAMPS UNNOTICED

Her poverty is diagnostic, grounded by Irish Republican
Socialist Party as battle cry. Tenacity is compulsion.
Underarm explosives snug. Guards at paratroops' base,
engrossed in tongue-wagging, flash, incinerate.

THIS THEATRE, YOUR PROMPT 27-31
~ A Poetic Sequence by Christopher Barnes ~

THIS THEATRE, YOUR PROMPT 27

Handrails on balcony.
Cropped, loose-tied velour.

Suitcase up on wardrobe.
Footstool-sized top hat.

THIS THEATRE, YOUR PROMPT 28

Uninviting bleachers.
Joystick-grasp synchronised winches.

Inking-nags on partition.
Chain mail suit.

THIS THEATRE, YOUR PROMPT 29

Palm blotches on cyclorama.
Nucleus of dim-lit heads.

Mock grume slurries towel.
Hatchet in leerdammer.

THIS THEATRE, YOUR PROMPT 30

Unified capacity of brightness.
Eye-level uninfluenced by turgid clutter.

Spandex bean bag.
Gorilla skull.

THIS THEATRE, YOUR PROMPT 31

Buttressed skycloth.
Pervasive ropes.

Stacked pewter tubs.
Barrowed melons.

TWO POEMS by James Bengler

*

IT'S

it's a fallen archway
 it's a rusted sign
 it's a path to nowhere
 it's your last dollar
 it's everything you wished it wasn't
 it's the dirt under your soles
 it's the last chance after the last chance
 it's you backed into a corner
 it's the clouds, always the clouds
 it's a guardrail guarding nothing
 it's the protective promise of failure
 it's behind you, but in front of you too
 it's everything beneath
 it's what's lacking above
 it's a slowly turning dime
it's a strangled sunflower
 it's what a passing jet leaves behind
 it's the lives trapped within that jet
 it's your life trapped in a prison without walls
 it's the fire, the fire
 it's the threat of freezing at night
 it's the scratchy underbrush of the day
 it's here, it's now, and that's all it is

*

ELEVATION

sifting cracks
under the overgrown
everything

planning for something
or nothing
all in the eye
nothing beyond

only a moment
that refuses
to stop

THREE POEMS by Stephen Philip Druce

*

HOW YOU FEEL INSIDE

They'll criticize your image—
all your efforts cast aside,
it's not about what others see—
it's how you feel inside.

They'll criticize your tatty boots—
your old flea-bitten three piece suits,
they'll slam your purple skin tight jeans—
your underwear behind the scenes,
they'll roast your cheap and plastic shoes—
your dated baggy flares amuse,
those earrings that never match—
your lipstick smudge and denim patch,
they'll ridicule your tiny specs—
your Botox and your muscle flex—
complain you're fat and then too thin—
they'll taunt your punk rock safety pin,
they'll mock you in your party shades—
and crucify your tailor-mades,
your tacky bling and pompous tie—
your piercings and stocking thigh,
they'll disapprove your skirt that splits—
your low cut overhanging tits—
offended by the wet see-through—

your mink fur coat and face tattoo,
your imperfections magnified—
so what?—it's how you feel inside.

*

THE GUITAR DEVIL

I strummed upon
the riverbank to
serenade a star,

it twinkled back as
if to thank us—
me and my guitar,

and in a black sky
turned to red, the
devil spoke to me
and said—

“hey I heard you
play in hell, you
pluck a mean axe
man—so well,

I play myself a
little too—so
a proposition just
for you,

a six string
challenge competition—
a head to head for
the best musician,

to be the king
of rock n' roll, just
beat me or I'll
take your soul.”

His talk was tough
as if he'd won,
I called his bluff—
now bring it on!

He launched his
flying v machine—an
electric repertoire routine,

he funk'd the groove
with Wah Wah pedal—
a lightning shred
of heavy metal,

he jazzed it
good in fingerstyle—
the happy chords to
make me smile,

he slapped the bass
with disco dashes—
soloed in flamenco flashes,

each string stroked
with sublime feel—
a delta blues for

my wounds to heal,

with sublime bends
in blurred contortion—
he lit the skies with
flames of distortion,

and then with animal attack—
he played one handed and
behind his back,

he said “you’re done—
I’ve got you beat,
I’m too good man—
you can’t compete.”

I said “you’re good
but you’re not in my class,
you want my soul?—
go and kiss my ass.”

*

REALITY IS OVERRATED

Reality is overrated—
overdone and saturated,
inundated—circulated—
infinitely demonstrated,
reality is overrated—
woke up and I’m irritated,
the cat’s in bed—it urinated—

my omelette cracked and separated,
reality is overrated—
the microwave it detonated,
walls of custard decorated,
the ceiling dripped decaffeinated,
reality is overrated—
the cupboard food is out-of-dated—
nowt but gravy granulated—
the duty free got confiscated,
reality is overrated—
the water pipes contaminated,
my freezing house refrigerated—
the builders never insulated,
reality is overrated—
electric bills and gas inflated,
living costs accelerated,
businesses have liquidated,
reality is overrated—
the NHS is dislocated,
emergencies intoxicated—
two days on a trolley waited,
reality is overrated—
rock n' roll disintegrated,
fashion genres dissipated,
cinemas evaporated,
reality is overrated—
street crime figures escalated,
no-go zones went armour plated—
prisons overpopulated,
reality is overrated—
birth is unsophisticated,
death is over-dedicated—
dream don't be assassinated.

THREE POEMS by Michael Lee Johnson

*

I CONCEAL MY CRAFT

I conceal my craft beneath the shell
of an armadillo, snug in its embrace,
nestled near its warmth,
as insects buzz under the midday sun,
where stories collide with struggles,
and words fester like unresolved thoughts,
distant from the critics' needle pen hearts.
Their relentless demands, cold cash,
and hollow praise layered thick with honey
on pages between verses, where every line
holds a lingering scent or memory.
I gaze up at the vast sky and chuckle.
Speaking in tongues nervously out of mind
shining chimes waiting for the next critic
to declare my thoughts don't flow,
out of character, my rhythm's a misstep.
I tally each word, joy, and sorrow.
One poem, one collection of verses for me.
One poem, one collection, a poetry book against me.
Breathe shallow, breathe hard for the heart with age.
I conceal my craft under the armor of the armadillo.

*

SHADOW WALKER

I walked into a shadow.
I found my mother there.
Age is no longer a factor.
Though memory leaves a feeling of 98.5 years.
But what do shadows, dreams,
and what fairies in the dust have in common?
She's no longer suffering from macular degeneration.
I can still see her as a 78-year-old son now.
But I'm not on Earth either, at least for now.
I follow her love and acceptance, her compassion.
But no human here is without the need of angels,
mother told me.
So, I must return, for now, a seeker of shadows.
On Earth, a confused poet in a jungle of branches.

*

DEAD GRASS-OLD POETS

I saw you both in centenarians' dreams.
Tweedledee and Tweedledum were way past
the recollection of years of recalling thoughts.
Diddling away time, storytelling in front of children

playing leapfrog with words.
 Posing as loners pulling whirligig toys around.
 Contemplating a simple facial gesture
 towards God, visualize a different image returned.
 Reflections, those darting, sinful shadows plaguing the dark.
 Poe never remembered much, amnesia sniffed out of a bottle.
 His impish actions created a theater of glued horror.
 Poe stumbles through dirt, mud paths,
 town streets, those night bars, local, deadly.
 Emerson's thoughts are not nearly the same.
 He never walked intoxicated, tripping
 on bygone wooden street planks.
 Ghost encounters were never the same,
 no steps, no stones, no delusions.
 Emerson's self-reliance, minus bubbly suds.
 Emerson's grave inscription
 Sleepy Hollow slumber, I rest—
 "Passive Master lent his hand."
 Dead grass, old poets, deceased.
 Poe, "Here, at last, I'm happy."
 Rolling over three red roses
 and a bottle of cognac.
 Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

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