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A DREAM SEQUENCE ~ Four Haibun by R.C. Thomas ~

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I DREAMED THE UNIVERSE: 30th August 2022

I dreamed the Universe 2.0 played its final show. In a dusty 1920s theatre, it ran through its greatest hits over the course of a couple of hours. Hammering them into our hearts. I was excited to hear the handful of new songs it showcased.

After the show, the Universe 2.0 sat on the stage catching its breath. “I was at a gig of yours a few years ago,” I said. The Universe 2.0 remembered. It pointed a definitive finger at me.

The Universe 1.0 stood next to me. It had attended the gig too. I introduced it to the Universe 2.0. The Universe 1.0 stuck up its nose, said, “I prefer your earlier work.”

swan song—
fading voices cry out
from the lake

*

THE UNIVERSE DREAMED I: 30th August 2023

The Universe dreamed I was watching its wedding video. Who it had married, nobody knew. At the reception, the camcorder moved from table to table. It followed the gossip of galaxies blurred out for anonymity. “This is the 37th time the Universe has married;” “After the vows were cemented, the Universe died;” “They’ve already left for their honeymoon.” The video then dissolved to a cartoon image of a flying black car.

departure lounge—
the kindness faces
take off again

*

I DREAMED THE UNIVERSE: 31st August 2022

I dreamed the Universe invited me to its housewarming party. The house was dilapidated. The splintered woodwork was patchy where there was once white paint. The floorboards creaked.

A handful of galaxies loitered in the kitchen and that was all. It wasn’t much of a party. At the far end of the kitchen, the backdoor opened onto the back garden, and the narrow door frame made a picture of tufts of overgrown grass in a muddy shade of green. The Universe brushed past me and made its way out the door. It motioned for me to join it. “The real party is outside,” it said.

It was just the two of us outside. An inflatable children’s paddling pool sat in a corner of the lawn. Fallen brown and orange leaves floated on top of the water. I’d

brought two snapping turtles as housewarming gifts. The Universe, indifferent to its gifts, returned inside. I plopped the turtles into the water, where they swam, happily snapping at their shadows.

snare's rhythm...
trying to swallow
the beat of life

*

THE UNIVERSE DREAMED I: 31st August 2023

The Universe dreamed I heard its child crying. I ran into the hallway. On a small flight of stairs the Universe was sitting calmly. It bounced its child on its feet. I sang its child a song about ears. How they help us hear everything that goes on. A simple song. The child listened, laughed, bounced some more.

conch shell...
dancing to the call
of a past life

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

26

swirling in cantrip patterns,
the watercourse rived.

*

That ubiquitous psyche
is simply a counterpart of yourself.

27

...mercurial
lurking schisms.

*

Furl into yourself,
hard-bitten stipulations.

28

...glinting flinders,
vulnerable to starlight.

*

Well-grounded delight
contradicts hocus pocus.

29

...horizontal pondering,
a marooned kilter.

*

Transparency dwindles
without essence.

30

...codification
of miscellaneous shrine trinkets.

*

Ring-fenced egos
impel unmasking.

TWO POEMS by Jason Ryberg

*

SCENES FROM 39th ST., PT. 1

The Poet With The Hole In His Throat
was busy soaking copies of *Black Like Me*
in gasoline, shouting I told you crackers
what I'd do the next time I saw one of these things!
And the Eastern Academic Elitist Poet
(from (eastern-most) Hoboken) was
attempting to set Tennyson's *Charge Of*
The Light Brigade to jew's harp, tone box and oboe.
And the ferocious Celtic / Valkyrie Poet
was feasting on the still-beating hearts
of all the fallen poets foolish enough
to have fallen for her Celtic siren song.
And God's Angry Poet was casting out
the under-cover Homeland Security Man
with Lillies of the Field and various
lyrical incantations and the street preachers
were ladeling snake oil from a fifty gallon drum
while some faintly unwholesome character
claiming to be the latest incarnation of the Bodhisattva
was saying to everyone and anyone on the street
HEY, PULL MY FINGER! PULL MY FINGER!
And then the ten-thousand myriad archetypes
became strangely quiet and still, the stars all stopped,

momentarily, in their places and the angels
and demons ceased their square-dancing on the heads
of pins and ten-penny nails, everywhere.
And still the Lonely Backwoods Bukowski-
Wanna-Be Poet sat there in a dank sub-basement
corner of his imagination, mindlessly ringing
wind chimes made from ninja stars, winding
and re-winding the ancient mechanical cricket of his art.

*

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

—*with apologies to the ghost of Li Po*

Yeah, yeah, I know that
it's clearly not one of the
smarter things you could
do with a row-boat
and a body of water
but, at the time, it

just seemed like it was
well within my skillset, my
wheelhouse, my purview,

as some people might
phrase it. I mean, what
could possibly go

wrong with paddling out
to the middle of a lake
with a chilled jug of

unfiltered rice wine
and an old hand-held AM /
FM radio,

tuned to the jazz and
classical station in hopes
that the moon just might

be more easily
persuaded, this time, to come
down and drink with me?

TWO POEMS by Stephen Mead

*

DESTINY COMES COURTIN'

So a bouquet of vegetables would have to do
since by the time we got to the hothouse
there were only a few sickly Lilies left
looked over like rotting pineapples
for ham during the Easter rush.

I don't know why people should consider us so strange
just because Uncle Toby kept sneezing & said it felt like
a waffle iron was stuck up his nose.
Plenty of other folks are weirder.

Why just consider where we live, that back slidin' pleasure palace.
What keeps it from toppling? The women I suppose,
on the stoops with their brooms & cigarettes.
The women who yell, "Hey, stay outta that alley!
Don't even think I don't see you!"

Plus, we've got our own kind of shop taking apart cars
as if the engines were leopards caged in some fury
& breakin' down out of spite to let us know
they're the queen. When they run it's mostly by luck
& three knocks on the hood.

That's why I had to come on this here scooter
with a bunch of browning broccoli.

Hey, I'm bringing life pure as emeralds
& a sky in my smile so don't tell me you ain't interested.

I have the heart of a forest, pure, lucent and green.

*

ANGEL, SLEEP

Let the wings of your lashes close.
Let your labored breathing,
that galloping horse, slow.
Let go the reins.
I will play Madame Butterfly
& whisper in translation.
Lullaby, sooth him.
Only gentle rain could compare to the hush.
As it enters your veins you will know that glade again
in the spring, the summer.
You will go in Klimt robes
away from these last months.

Lord, the lungs have come up with enough blood,
the throat, enough strangleholds,
the spirit, enough coasters rolling.

You told me, Senor V., & an angel eavesdropping
is now intervening—
Poppies, poppies, a descent of Mama Morphia, a sail

(e poi la nave) you live in, (appare),
the white bed itself, (& the ship),
floating, (will appear)
for io con sicura, (I shall await him),
un bel di, (one fine day),
vedremo, (we'll see)—

So sleep, love—

domini

FOUR POEMS by Michael Lee Johnson

*

CROWS

Tired of hunger
tired of emptiness
late February winter snow—
crow claws locked in
on my condo balcony
steel railings.
Their desperate eyes
focus in on my green eye
sockets—
their search begins,
I go to bed, no ruffled feathers showing—
their imaginary dreams of green—
black wings fly flapping—
the hunt, scavengers, over barren fields—
shadows in the way
now late August
summer sun
bright yellow
turning orange—
hard corn.

*

FOG MAN

There is a stranger in the fog
screaming into this harbor tonight.
A lonely son-of-a-bitch without
a mother or a lover.
He screams obscenities
with bad breath.
There is a way the moon
investigates a sailor in fog
at night, sheltering no one.
Hungover in the lead piping
suffering from myopia
but downing in pride,
hyperopia magnified.
These memories are distant.
A lady now of a dream
still walker on sliding sand
near that beach, leaving
sounds of her own
where winds tell the
fog man where to cry.
Life a saint in blue mist
a roller coaster, thrill
master-slave driver
of its own.

*

IN MY WILL

In my will, there will be a pinball machine.
A renovated jukebox from American Pickers,
a cable TV show. For the taverns, bars,
and basements of fun seekers for those
who long to be free and ferocious.
I no longer fear death.
Empty vodka bottle by my bed.
A dusty Bible underlined
Jesus' messages
in red.

*

OLD FIDDLE MAN

Old daddy man
playing fiddle man
in a family youth band.
He was the star.
Crowds paid & rushed
through that door, dancing
clapping to hear a few slim notes
for just transitory seconds
a few brief notes only
realizing the ephemeral
rhythm man before he died.
Dance, dance, dance,
fiddle man past midnight

tonight, he lost his bow.
83 years old, arthritic fingers
World War 2 man
scally cap, cheese cutter cap—
dipped down cap.
83 years old fiddle man.
Thornwood Restaurant & Lounge.

FOUR POEMS by Stephen Philip Druce

*

THE DEMON IN THE BOTTLE

The demon in
the bottle, lights
up in the dark,
the night won't let
my pain forget
the wounds that
left their mark,
a bottle for my troubles,
my tortured soul forlorn,
seductive for my lonesome,
my shipmate in a storm,

a bottle for my broken,
to comfort when dejected,
the demon's charm will
twist my arm and
join my disconnected,

a bottle for my shaking,
a tempter when I'm weak,
the demon coax will drink
a toast in honor of
my losing streak,

a bottle by persuasion,
enticing for the snare,
a demon cup to
buck me up and
drown my deep despair,

the demon in
the bottle, lights
up in the dark,
the night won't let
my pain forget
the wounds that
left their mark.

*

PLANET JAZARANE

Planet Jazarane—
where rustling herds of marching embers,
ooze a masquerade of tickled trenches
in seething dominion,

torched waterfalls, nourished by zephyr mastery,
lurch languid in a godly zeal of paradigm vanity,

sandcastle-shaped serpents trigger-spew
a soaring horizon of tangled theaters in
screeching flower cages,

scalded in sodden shadow, the swooping
goose machine scatters its crinkled chimes

in a sensory mist of ragged tigers
and skating vulture dust,

the canvas hermit—

nurtured in chalice,

furtive in fountain,

splashed by ruby—

as the wilted maestro sits
in a solitude ceremony
of feathered ferocity—

the pianist's final flourish.

*

PLANET JAYGORM

On Planet Jaygorm, skittle creatures
ricochet plumes of alchemy mutants,

skyline overtures in bleak exodus,
squeal their glistening contours in
blundered hysteria and disfigured glee,

distilled in a gallant gory remnant,
the jolted wanderings of loaded crystal
chambers, fickle mutiny in
supernatural solace,

as the jarring sorcerers etch ephemeral
their supine shards of howling epilogues
in burlesque assembly,

the crooked stars in hooded vaults,
yearn to bedevil their tawdry transcripts—
unkempt for the ether.

*

PLANET YIZZARO

On Planet Yizzaro, crawling corridors
of glazed limpets in clustered folly,
cascade a symphony blossom to tantalize
the tattered artist in a towering squalor
of lampooned puppets ablaze,

plunged in feral escapade,
a dalliance interlude of watercolor
vessels drip their fluttered meadows
for willow portraits in starry infancy
and shimmering bliss,

hounded by the giddy margins,
the creaking valley—listless for rhapsody,
mutters its hollow blessings in a saintly
pattern of glimmering sapphire—
the treasured muse in slender desertion.

DEAF GRANDMA

~ A Short Story by Dimitris Passas ~

She was there when I was born. She'd come to the maternity clinic along with my father, her son, and together they endured the thrill and anxiety that the process of birth always involves. My grandma was solid as a rock and always by the side of her loved ones at times of need, a loving shoulder to lean on when everything had gone pear-shaped. She had a tough life. She survived the vicious decade of the 1940s in Greece when the country suffered the atrocities of the civil war right after the Nazi occupation, which lasted for three years, ended. She lost her elder brother in the war and the trauma never ceased to haunt her even when she began to exhibit mild signs of dementia.

Her name was Helen. A beautiful name. My father hoped that my brother's firstborn girl, who saw the light of the world only 2 years before my grandma passed away, would be named after her, a sign of profound respect for the woman who raised him. However, the tiny lady was eventually named Olivia, subverting everyone's expectations. Helen had 4 children and a husband who saw his role as the provider for the family and nothing more than that. She carried the burden while also working as a seamstress to make ends meet. In my eyes, she was a true heroine for all the hardships she faced throughout her life. I looked up to her since I was a little boy.

Even though nobody could accuse my grandma of being frigid, she wasn't the type of individual to become embroiled in meaningless chit-chat with others. She loved us all profoundly, but always kept a certain distance. It always vexed me that we couldn't establish the rapport I desired. Perhaps her aloofness had its roots in her upbringing and lost childhood which was marked by her beloved brother's untimely death. Her mother was a strict despot who firmly believed that austerity is the quintessence of pedagogy. Thus, she never learned how to embrace human contact.

During her last years, Helen's health was progressively deteriorating, and she'd come to live with our family in order to receive the necessary care. Dementia

was added to her chronic hearing impairment that put a barrier to communicating with us. When I talked to her, I literally had to shout to be heard. I caught her many times trying to read my lips and always failing. I used to perceive her semi-deafness as a symbol and metaphor for her detached manner. Her condition saddened me as I was sure that she had such a rich inner world. Even though we didn't have the opportunity to share our thoughts, I was convinced that she would it would be delightful to sit down and have a long talk with her.

Since she came home, I made several attempts to approach her. I thought that what would work best in terms of effectiveness in communication would be to ask her direct questions about her life and offer her the chance to share her reminiscences of past joys and sorrows with her grandson who was a little boy no more. What was her relationship with her five sisters? How stringent her own mother really had been? But what I wanted most deep down was to learn about her ways of coping with personal disasters. I never saw her lose her cool regardless of the predicaments she had to face.

At the time, I was traversing a rough period of depression mixed with addiction issues and chaos reigned in my life and mind. Helen's stoic presence felt like a divine gift if it wasn't for her hearing problem that limited her impact on me. I craved for words, wise words by an elderly woman of immense experience. So, one night, I knocked on the door of her tiny room and sat at the edge of the bed. I was feeling so low for such a long time. My parents were loving and caring but the communication between us was broken, mostly due of my persistent lies and precarious lifestyle. I told her in a loud, but soft voice:

"Grandma, I wanted to ask you something and I want you to be honest with me. Is it possible to return? Can I ever be the person, the good person, I was before? I feel dirty, ugly and old. I'm lost."

She took a long stare at me and said nothing. This startling confession was the bravest act I made in my entire life. I got up from the bed and I was ready to exit her room, sure that she hadn't heard a single thing. As I was putting my hands on the door's handle, I heard her articulating: "Dear boy, a man is more than his worst deed." Since then, this aphorism became my beaconing light.

I was there when she died. One sizzling, hot night in July, right after dinner she complained of stomach pain and went to lie down early. Half an hour later she was dead. The doctors said that the cause was a massive heart attack. Her loss felt like a stab in the heart. I had never cried as much as I did the days after the event.

The funeral was austere and attended by friends and relatives who felt obligated to pay farewell to a good woman. My beloved, deaf Grandma.

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