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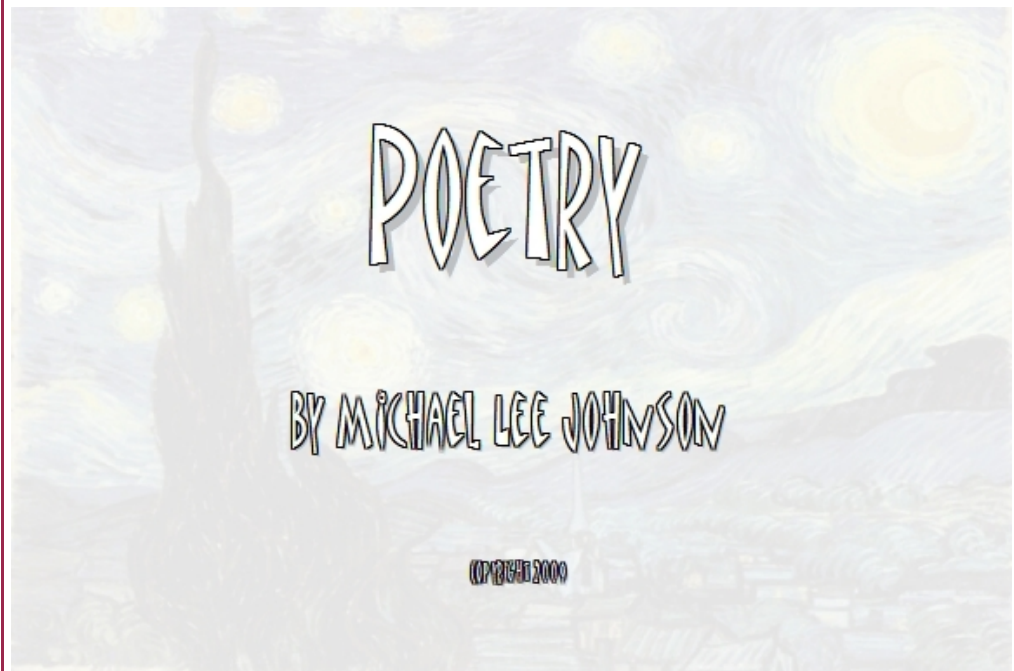
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Gingerbread Lady

Gingerbread lady,
no sugar or cinnamon spice;
years ago arthritis and senility took their toll.
Crippled mind moves in then out, like an old sexual adventure
blurred in an imagination of fingertip thoughts.
Who in hell remembers the characters?
There was George, her lover, near the bridge at the Chicago River:
she missed his funeral; her friends were there.
She always made feather-light of people dwelling on death,
but black and white she remembers well.
The past is the present; the present is forgotten.
Who remembers Gingerbread Lady?
Sometimes lazy-time tea with a twist of lime,
sometimes drunken-time screwdriver twist with clarity.
She walks in scandals; sometimes she walks in soft night shoes.

Her live-in maid smirks as Gingerbread Lady gums her food,
false teeth forgotten in a custom-imprinted cup
with water, vinegar, and ginger.
The maid died. Gingerbread Lady looks for a new maid.
Years ago, arthritis and senility took their toll.
Yesterday, a new maid walked into the nursing home.
Ginger forgot to rise out of bed;
no sugar, or cinnamon toast.

Harvest Time (Version 5 Final)

A Métis Indian lady, drunk,
hands blanketed over as in prayer,
over a large brown fruit basket
naked of fruit, no vine, no vineyard
inside—approaches the Edmonton,

Alberta adoption agency.
There are only spirit gods
inside her empty purse.

Inside, an infant,
restrained from life,
with a fruity wine sap apple
wedged like a teaspoon
of autumn sun
inside its mouth.
A shallow pool of tears starts
to mount in native blue eyes.
Snuffling, the mother offers
a slim smile, turns away.
She slithers voyeuristically
through near slum streets,
and alleyways,
looking for drinking buddies
to share a hefty pint
of applejack wine.

Charley Plays a Tune (Version 2)

Crippled with arthritis
and Alzheimer's,
in a dark rented room,
Charley plays
melancholic melodies
on a dust filled
harmonica he
found abandoned
on a playground of sand
years ago by a handful of children
playing on monkey bars.
He now goes to the bathroom on occasion,
relieving himself takes forever; he feeds the cat when
he doesn't forget where the food is stashed at.
He hears bedlam when he buys fish at the local market
and the skeleton bones of the fish show through.
He lies on his back riddled with pain,
pine cones fill his pillows and mattress;
praying to Jesus and rubbing his rosary beads
Charley blows tunes out his
celestial instrument
notes float through the open window
touch the nose of summer clouds.
Charley overtakes himself with grief
and is ecstatically alone.
Charley plays a solo tune.

Nikki Purrs

Soft nursing
5 solid minutes

of purr
paw peddling
like a kayak competitor
against ripples of my
60 year old river rib cage—
I feel like a nursing mother
but I'm male and I have no nipples
Sometimes I feel afloat.
Nikki is a little black skunk,
kitten, suckles me for milk,
or affection?
But she is 8 years old a cat.
I'm her substitute mother,
afloat in a flower bed of love,
and I give back affection
freely unlike a money exchange.
Done, I go to the kitchen, get out
Fancy Feast, gourmet salmon, shrimp,
a new work day begins.

Rod Stroked Survival with a Deadly Hammer

Rebecca fantasized that life was a lottery ticket or a pull of a lever,
that one of the bunch in her pocket was a winner or the slots were a redeemer;
but life itself was not real that was strictly for the mentally insane at the Elgin
Mental Institution.

She gambled her savings away on a riverboat
stuck in mud on a riverbank, the Grand Victoria, in Elgin, Illinois.
Her bare feet were always propped up on wooden chair;
a cigarette dropped from her lips like morning fog.
She always dreamed of traveling, not nightmares.
But she couldn't overcome, overcome,
the terrorist ordeal of the German siege of Leningrad.
She was a foreigner now; she is a foreigner for good.
Her first husband died after spending a lifetime in prison
with stinging nettles in his toes and feet; the second
husband died of hunger when there were no more rats
to feed on, after many fights in prison for the last remains.
What does a poet know of suffering?
Rebecca has rod stroked survival with a deadly mallet.
She gambles nickels, dimes, quarters, tokens tossed away,
living a penniless life for grandchildren who hardly know her name.
Rebecca fantasized that life was a lottery ticket or the pull of a lever.

Mother, Edith, at 98

Edith, in this nursing home
blinded with macular degeneration,
I come to you with your blurry
eyes, crystal sharp mind,
your countenance of grace—
as yesterday's winds
I have chosen to consume you
and take you away.

"Oh, where did Jesus disappear
to", she murmured,
over and over again,
in a low voice
dripping words
like a leaking faucet:
"Oh, there He is my
Angel of the coming."

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Michael Lee Johnson is a poet and freelance writer from Itasca, Illinois BA. Sociology, major paper short a MA Correctional Administration, 3 courses toward a Phd and quit. Michael has been published in over 22 countries. He is also editor/publisher of four poetry sites, which can be found at his website: <http://poetryman.mysite.com/>.