

Life

in

2-D

+

Two

(that's 2)!!

By

Danielle McMahon

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... A cut-paste poem, hmmm, I have always reserved this technique for ransom notes, baiting the authorities and thwarting handwriting examiners. McMahon has elevated it to an artform. In 'Life in 2-D' she excerpts words and phrases from a novel by A. K. Dewdney. The language and imagery are inspired, but who's to be praise? Surely both (...didn't she play Hazel?) "...planiverse, a book / about a tabletop / world." Next, Danielle submits '#6 Mary Sequence (FAME)' with a degree of rhyme-shaming, but I think it's simply grand. "Mary's scary—gone insane / Dreams of melting when it rains...Mary's husband turns up dead / He's but a stain on Mary's bed." Blood-tickling, rib-curdling stuff, it's a can't miss. And, if you dare to get further inside Danielle's mind, 'The Oracle's Voicemail' tempts points of no return: "I tried to call you Collect / from the junkyard on Staten Island / where my*

*Chevy was scrapped"... "I let my nails / grow to sickles, / so long I could barely / dial your number." ...begging the question, why would McMahon feel a need to cut-and-paste anyone else's thoughts. (To maintain poet's spacing, each poem is on its own page. Please scroll down.)*

*Five Stars*

## Life in 2-D

(Cut/paste poem; source: Dewdney, A.K. "Life in 2-D." Science Year: The World Book Science Annual, 1983. World Book Inc., 1982, pp. 304.)

Let us imagine  
a vast expanding  
water cannot go around—

Until this day, rivers,  
a reckoning, a rather  
inhospitable topography  
of billions of flat stars,

a speckled  
planet, a playground,  
a planiverse, a book  
about a tabletop  
world.

Ex-lay-people, axes  
all lined up, an allegory  
intended to illustrate—

Windstorms  
circumference a circular  
world, the bottoms of hills,  
realms along the horizon,

bodies  
that will not fit:

being born, living,  
and dying, we begin  
each rainfall,

edge-to-edge—

raise a toast,  
something in two hands.



## #6 Mary Sequence (FAME)

Mary's fat-lipped, bloodied red  
Her Hubby's bedbugs in the bed  
She wants to protest but instead  
Mary's thoughts race in her head

Mary's scary—gone insane  
Dreams of melting when it rains  
Mary feels the itch for \*FAME\*  
Mary needs a new refrain

Mary files for divorce  
Mary's voice has gotten hoarse  
She thinks of leaving but, of course,  
Mary feels a deep remorse

Mary's husband turns up dead  
He's but a stain on Mary's bed  
No more meat for bedbug's bread  
So bedbugs climb into her head

Mary is now One Big Louse  
Mary sports a showy blouse  
She considers a new spouse  
But first she goes and sells her house

Mary flies to Hollywood  
Infests a glitzy neighborhood  
Mary's dreams now understood  
She is really Feeling Good

The bugs now command Mary's brain  
Mary seeks her claim to \*FAME\*  
But Mary cannot stop the strain  
So Mary needs a new refrain

Mary flaunts her sex appeal  
Mary lands a movie deal  
But now Mary starts to feel  
That none of this is Really Real

Mary brings a strange man home

She doesn't want to be alone  
In Mary's dream, she turns to stone  
And when she wakes, the man has flown

Mary's head hurts; she fears the rain  
The bugs are pushing on her brain  
For reasons no-one can explain  
She lay her head down and became,  
In the end, a bloody stain

## The Oracle's Voicemail

I tried to call you Collect  
from the junkyard on Staten Island  
where my Chevy was scrapped

after the 111th floor elevator door  
crashed through the windshield,  
but

I couldn't get through  
on account of the mummified stray cats  
cradled in the telephone wires.

I wanted to tell you  
of the visions I entertained  
since my cable was knocked out

in that plague of locusts  
last Tuesday.  
How

water falls like knives now  
and I ate my frosted flakes  
from a post-apocalyptic cereal bowl.

I wanted to tell you how  
I wept bitterly  
at the diluted dappled brilliance  
of monarch's wings.

How I, supine  
left a slice of my shadow  
on a slab of crumbling red clay  
after the caustic rain.

How I heard  
my goldfish grinding  
its tiny teeth in the tank  
before dully combusting.

I wanted to tell you how I kissed to bless  
the sooty skulls

from the catacomb in the back garden

and waited in a forest of uprooted ironwork  
for an owl-eyed demon  
to exchange my mortal soul  
for a handcrafted laundry basket.

I waited, cradling a fetal elephant  
in my palm, smooth as soap  
(that Valentine you gave me last year)

and I am still  
waiting.

I let my nails  
grow to sickles,  
so long I could barely  
dial your number.

#### **THE POET SPEAKS:**

*I am drawn to poetry because, really, it is great fun. It is a language puzzle, a brain game, with all the rules made-up on the fly. I write because I am forever chasing that moment when all the pieces snap together, and the poem I'm working on has reached its peak form. Language play is my favorite part, and, for me, the process of experimenting and bounding toward the unexpected is the big reward.*

*"Mary #6" is what happens when I combine vague snapshots of my grandmother Mary with religious iconography, bad sci-fi movies, and a bouncy rhyme. I wrote it within an hour and had a wonderful time. "The Oracle" came to me in a few lines as I was commuting on a city bus—or maybe it was triggered by one of those old collect-call commercials. I found the original article for "Life in 2D" in a 1980s science book at a thrift store, and the speculative language in it was so interesting to me that I had to take it apart.*

*I am happy to feed my imagination with all types of influence. Some of my favorite authors are: Lewis Nordan, Tomaz Salamun, Ray Bradbury, Frank O'Hara, John Steinbeck, Maxine Kumin and Denis Johnson. Harryette Mullen's book "Sleeping with the Dictionary" uprooted my understanding of what poetry can be. Raymond Queneau's "Exercises in Style" reminded me not to take myself too seriously.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Danielle McMahan's poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in tiny spoon, Lammergeier, Rogue Agent, Tales from PA, Better Than Starbucks, and Storm Cellar. She lives in PA with her family.



