

8 POEMS

By Dee Allen

To keep the poet's spacing Hezekiah's note appears after the poems.

POETRY SUBMISSIONS FOR FLEAS ON THE DOG #6

DISCOVERY

There'd be no Dita Von Teese,
No Princess Farhana,
No Julie Strain,
No Suicide Girls,
No Coco Lectric,
No Christy Mack,
No paintings
By Olivia

Jenna Jameson,
Debi Mazar,
Renée Zellwiger,
Gemma Arterton,
Millions of Goth
Females worldwide
Would've never
Played dress-up

Without the one discovery
Of two Black men

Virtually unknown,
Totally unsung.

Leading musicians into battle
With Bebop Jazz notes
Wasn't enough for
Cass Carr.

The Jamaican bass player
Led another phalanx of men
Hitting beachheads like
Hell's Kitchen, Harlem, upstate New York
Pastures, kept his other
Weapon of choice close at hand,
Took advantage of every precious shot.

A beautiful rainbow
Crafted from each photo
Puerto Rican, African, Caucasian
Glamour models

Cheesecakes and nudes—
Of the fairer side
Of Carr's pictorial rainbow,
Only one stood out as exceptional—

Coal-black hair
Framed her smiling smile,
Light-blue sapphires
Posing as eyes,
Perfect hourglass
Figure, pale as moonglow.
All the curves in
All the right places.
The finest woman
Ever to cross

His flashing camera sight.

With her homemade nightwear on
Or bikinis or without,

She felt no shame
In her game.
Audacious Tennessee rose
Born to strike a pose.

Handcuffs were slapped on the wrists
Of Carr and twenty-two from his
Camera club when police raided a farm.
Nude photography, harmless act
A crime anywhere in Truman's U.S.A.

Carr's discovery, also arrested & charged.
"Indecent exposure" she resisted.
"Posing was fun", she insisted.
The judge gave her what she gave
The entire courtroom: Disorderly conduct.

Word on the scandal
Found its way in
Whispers, hearsay, loose talk.
Thereafter, the model,
Her sweet name, her sultry image

Were given
Underground notoriety.

Patrolling the street
On the Brooklyn beat
Wasn't enough for
Jerry Tibbs.

The married N.Y.P.D. officer
On some days would shed

His dark blue uniform & wore
The sable one he was
Born with.
Just a man enjoying his spare time,
His busy hands worked a camera.
On Coney Island's
White sandy beach,
He found her.
A Southern transplant
Curious about her
New Northern home.

His eyes saw
"Model" in her
Straightaway.

His clicking Kodak©
Truly loved her
From the start.

Stance per stance,
Pic per pic,
Tibbs' work seemed
Ready to be shown.

Then again, he thought
Something had to be
Done about his subject's
Already movie star looks.

Jerry Tibbs talked her
Into wearing short-cut
Bangs with her long ebony hair.

Cass Carr took her
Picture again and again and they
Sold well in Manhattan nightclubs.

And the shutterbugs
And the barflies
They knew why.

The playful
Pale lady
Many have seen

Cracking a whip like a dom,
Tied with robe like a sub,
Taking a bubble bath in vibrant colour,
Dancing seductively with her partner
A stuffed clown doll in grainy black-and-white,

Splashing happily in water
On Miami Beach shore,
Gracing men's magazine covers
Dressed in a leopard print skirt
Or her famous black lingerie and nylons—

Men back then wanted to date her.
Women right now want to emulate her.
Bettie Page, Queen Of Curves
Would've never
Lived that title

Without being guided in the right direction
By two Black men

Virtually unknown,
Totally unsung.

PROGRAM

NASHVILLE 1934

*C'mon, Goldie!
C'mon, Love!
C'mon, kids!
Let's git a
Sit-down circle goin'!
Grab all your
Newspaper
Magazine
Movie star pictures!
It's time
For a round of*

PROGRAM!

*The game where
The stars of
Radio and movies
Bring Hollywood
To you!*

This was more than
Her source of amusement.
All the sitting children's
Eyes had amazement
Flashing from them
As 11-year old
Bettie danced the hula
To ukulele music

Like a born Hawai'ian,
Played cute & cheerful
Like Little Orphan Annie,
Went melodramatic
Like Greta Garbo
In the movie
Grand Hotel
Wanting nothing more
Than to be alone,
Bickered back & forth
Like Fibber McGee & Molly,
Smear'd her pale
Face black with
Shoe polish to do
Amos 'N' Andy,
Be laughing & elegant
Like Jean Harlow
Would in her trademark
White satin
Evening gown.

This was when she was
First bitten and
Infected by the acting bug.
This was when she first
Exercised her power
To entertain
And enchant the masses.
Those days at
The downtown
Orphanage.
Poverty
Had split apart
The Page home, so
There the boys stayed
With Mama Edna.
The washerwoman
Never wanted girls

Anyway—her words.
Playing a kid's game

Taught Bettie early on
How to pose—

W: Thankstaking 2019

THE BRIBE

NASHVILLE 1936

*Here's some dimes, girl.
Go outside and
Have some fun.*

A handful of dimes.
Roughly \$2 worth.
Given to Bettie as 20
Shiny silver Liberty heads.

*Go to the movies,
Since that's
Whut ya like.*

Dimes enough to hit up
All the theatres in town,
Buy popcorn to snack on and a Hines©
Root beer at the drug store counter afterwards.

*Now, Chummy,
Whut happened t'day
Stays 'tween us.*

The silver screen, the black-and-white features
It showed, was a sanctuary for
Bettie, age 13, sacred as
Another Sunday in church.

So lissen

*Real good,
Ya hear?*

On the screen, gods and goddesses of
Tinseltown played, actors made her happy place safe:
Katherine Hepburn, Clark Gable, Roy Rogers and
Wavy-haired singing pretty boy Dick Powell.

*Don't tell
Yo' mama
A thang.*

Cinema was her sanctuary, away from
Grabby hands reaching under her blouse,
Sliding hands moving much lower,
Probing hands scarring her in private

Outside and in,
Forceful hands robbing her of innocence—
At home, the word *molester*
By another name was *Daddy*.

A handful of dimes.
Roughly \$2 worth.
Pay given to Bettie to keep
Roy Page's abuse quiet.

W: 12.5.19

1947

The passion of
High school
Went cold
After marriage.

Returning to Nashville
From San Francisco
Failed to rekindle
Any dead embers,
Failed to reignite
The old fire.
Separation between
Bettie and her
Husband Billy was the best
Way out of that.

Bettie left for
Miami, her
Future sanctuary
From the pressures
Of the North.
Secretarial work
For a furniture
Making firm brought her to

Haiti—Land of searing
Caribbean sun,
Mangoes, sugarcane
And rum.
Whirlwind romances

Happen as quickly as
The phrase's name implies,
For Bettie was caught
In a whirlwind
Of fondness for
The island nation's
Weather, people, culture
And a local man.

His own fondness
For the blue-eyed
Visitor made her
Forsake her
Jim Crow upbringing.
The White teen-ager
Who shouted rude names
At two Black girls
For snatching movie star
Trading cards from her

Left for dead
In Port Au Prince.

The forests of midnight
Had music all their own:
Conga drums,
Kreyol chants,
Masques covering
Faces wailing
To their *loa*,*
Black feet
Pounding out a dance
Around a bonfire.
Voodoo rite
Bettie & her companion
Saw through the
Trees and vines
Gave her

The mother of thrills.

President Truman
Refused to give
Haiti foreign aid.
President Estimé
Failed to calm
His money-poor citizens down.
With haste, Bettie
Boarded a plane with
Other Americans & flew
Rather than face
The people's rage.

Back in Miami,
Working the nightclubs
With a local
Hack comedian somehow
Stirred into
Awakening from
Suspended animation
Her dream
Of becoming
An actress,
Wanting to be seen
On the silver screen

And the tall skyscrapers
And bright neon lights
And show biz venues
Of New York City

As shown on
Some new contraption
Called television
As seen from
A store front window

Caught her eye.
Her destiny

Pointed
Northward—

W: Summer Solstice 2018

*KREYOL: "God".

THIS LADY VANISHES

Winter 1957: Brooding, anxiety over her future
 MadE this lady leave New York City.
 The Kefauver obscenity hearings
In D.C., an atTempt at rushing her bedroom window
 TakIng a fatal plunge into the street,
Receiving typEwritten notes from some stalker,

 Unexpected Protection from the F.B.I., used as
 Gorgeous bAit, luring out his 16-year old sick ass
 Gave her ample reasons to vanish
From our gazE, beyond our reach—

W: 6.28.18

GOLDIE JANE

*Are there any more
At home like you?
Hume-Fogg High School
Football and basketball
Hero Billy Neal asked
A debating team hopeful
Studying at a park.
Yes, there's two
And they're so much
Prettier than me
Bettie answered,
Selling herself short
While avoiding any
Additional pick-up lines
From an athletic bad boy,
Knowing Mama
Didn't want her
Dating anyone.*

Young book-smart
Bobby soxer Bettie
Knew the family
Situation well, having
To care for them daily
Like an assistant mama
And regarding the female
Half of the Page household,
Indeed there was
Another like her:

Same long black
Hair, only curlier,
Deep chestnut
Brown eyes, sharp contrast
To Bettie's baby blues.
Otherwise, same
Porcelain complexion,
Well-rounded hips,
Shapely legs, winning grin.
Mama Edna's younger,
Prettier duplicate.
Spiritual twin
To her famous sister.
Belle of the backyard
Beauty pageants
From childhood,
Tailor of her own
Dresses and swimwear,
Easy on photographers'
Eyes and their cameras,
Burlesque queen of the STL*,
Abdicated her crown and
The nightclub stage for
The quiet life
Of suburban housewife,
Mother, painter, art teacher,
Poet, songwriter, woodworker.

Glamour and creativity
Rode her pallid skin
At once, mileage attained
On that other woman from
Nashville known as
Miss Page, Mrs. Brem,
Gloria or to her kinfolk,
Though ill-fitting for a brunette,
Goldie Jane.

W: 5.3.19

*Abbreviation for "Saint Louis, Missouri".

FISHNETS

Swimming fish
Are spared
From human
Capture today.

The fishnets
Have captured
Another living thing
Or two, encircled

More tightly
Wrapped around
A nice
Pair of

Smooth shaven
Lady legs
Standing on
The subway

Platform, awaiting
The next
Train leaving
West Oakland.

Mexican, twentysomething
Slender female in a yellow
Dress & pumps across from me
Owned it proudly

Transparent,
Shadowy
Second
Skin.

Those fishnets
She's wearing
Reminds me so much
Of pin-ups from the 1950s:

Centered in the spotlight
Showcasing her luscious form,
And dark-webbed calves:
Burlesque red-head Tempest Storm

Or Nashville brunette
Dark Angel Bettie Page
Posing in the photographer's studio
Netted legs made to walk any stage.

Those fishnets
Can catch
More than
Schools of fish.

They're good, I think,
For trapping
Eyes of males, aroused, wanting
Then pulling them in.

W: 11.14.16

LONE WOLF

Long before
This perilous time,
Long before
This unhealthy clime,

Long before
Death tolls in every land,
Long before
Infection held the upper hand,

I've distanced myself from the crowd—
Strong intention from my heart—
To extract myself from willful
Ignorance which I had no part,

To secede from the arrogant,
Their every petty construction,
To leave before they overwhelm me—
Orgies of reputation destruction.

I have more respect for animals
Than for the human race.
Six feet apart, for me,
Isn't enough space.

I've met some good people—
They're few and far between—
Because my heart felt wounded countless times,
I shun the social scene.

These are words of experience
From one humble creature.

I roam the harsh wilderness
A lone wolf—by nature.

W: 4.4.2020

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes: There is something about Dee Allen I just love. Her words spell like incantations. She is a menagerie of notions. “Interesting stuff going on and I like the narrative imprint that runs through the 8. They challenge because they are outside the mainstream of underground but still dirty, still septic.” That is a quote from Senior Editor, Charles Pinch himself...no sense me prattling on...

THE POET SPEAKS:

Dee Allen.

THE POET SPEAKS

[END-NOTES FOR FLEAS ON THE DOG #6]

DISCOVERY

I’ve been a fan of the 1950s American pin-up model Bettie Page since early 1998. The Bettie Page revival actually began in 1992. So I’m willing to admit to coming to that party late. In late 1997, I first learned of Miss Page’s life and achievements through an essay in indigo #7, a Chicago-based Gothic personal ‘zine created by editor Michelle Aiello [where two hand-written poems of mine were published at the time]. Then I walked into a funky gift shop one cold day and found, hanging from a clothing rack, a black Bettie Page t-shirt. The front image was a reproduction of a cover for a magazine from 1956 called Fantastique, featuring Miss Page sitting on a bed with a striped spread in her black lingerie, leather opera

gloves and big black platform boots, pouting seductively. I've had a celebrity crush on her since then. So as one of her fans, I had to write this bio-poem and inform potential readers on who discovered Bettie Page before anyone else. And they weren't White.

PROGRAM

Reading *The Real Bettie Page* by Richard Foster inspired this part-persona poem. It's a glimpse into Miss Page's Great Depression/New Deal-era childhood. After he made a 17-year old girl pregnant, washerwoman/beautician Edna Pirtle Page had divorced her auto mechanic husband Roy. The daunting task of taking care of six children by herself was too much. So Mama Page placed her girls [Bettie, Goldie and Joyce—nick-named "Love"] into a Protestant orphanage in downtown Nashville for one year, while the boys [Billy, Jack and Jimmy] remained at

home. To amuse themselves while staying in such dreary surroundings, Bettie and her younger sisters made up a game where they danced and imitated their favourite Hollywood movie and radio stars. They called it "Program" and it became popular with the orphaned kids. In an online interview at Starwave's Celebrity Lounge in March 1996, Miss Page attributed her later ability to pose in front of the camera to this children's game of hers.

THE BRIBE

Another part-persona poem inspired by *The Real Bettie Page*. This one focused on the time when Mama Page made one of the biggest mistakes of her life: Renting out a room at the house to her ex-husband Roy, who in Miss Page's words was "the worst womanizer of his sort". It was then Roy proceeded to molest his own daughter constantly. Daddy Page would reward her with a handful of dimes, on the condition that she'd keep his sexual abuse silent. Young Bettie's means of escape was going to the movies and the pharmacy soda counter.

1947

Another poem inspired by *The Real Bettie Page*, as well as interviews, biographies and a 1997 E! True Hollywood Story episode. This chapter of Miss Page's life focused on leaving her first husband and brief work as a furniture company secretary in Haiti, only to leave on an aeroplane in the midst of civil unrest. Her return to the United States [via Miami] was the crucial point where her interest in becoming an actress was reborn.

THIS LADY VANISHES

My first attempt at a mesostic poem, which uses one capital letter per line to spell out a word pertaining to the poem's subject. In this particular case, I used one capital letter per line to spell out the name Bettie Page. This one briefly covers the factors leading to Miss Page's departure from New York City, after 7 straight years of modelling.

GOLDIE JANE

Inspired by the book *Bettie Page: The Lost Years* by Tori Rodriguez and Ron Brem [the only child of the title woman herself and Bettie Page's nephew], as well as *The Real Bettie Page*. Basically an ode to one of Miss Page's sisters; the one who followed her everywhere, even into the world of photo modelling. To start out the poem, I had to re-create the first time Miss Page met her future husband Billy Neal at a park in Nashville, while studying for their high school's debate team. Neal's first words were key, as was young Bettie's coy response. This exchange served as a segueway to discuss Goldie Jane.

FISHNETS

Based on an actual incident at West Oakland B.A.R.T. in November 2016. One Sunday afternoon, while leaving one subway train from San Francisco headed for the Dublin – Pleasanton area, I waited on the platform for a Richmond-bound subway train. Across the platform from where I stood was a young, attractive Mexican woman standing in wait for a train of her own, headed for S.F. Airport. The woman wore a short-sleeved, bright banana-yellow dress and matching pumps, along with—black fishnet stockings. At that moment, I couldn't take my eyes off her. Wearing those fishnets with her ensemble made this woman much more attractive to me, like a 1950s pin-up picture brought to life. Then her train finally arrived; she stepped on it

and left the platform. When the subway train departed, my sweetest dream was over.

LONE WOLF

In the age of the Coronavirus pandemic, one of the ways to slow down the spread of this new disease is social distancing, which, according to the U.S. Centre of Disease Control, means standing/sitting six feet apart from the next person. Truth be told, I've practised social distancing my whole life, before this unforeseen turn

of world events. I did that primarily to avoid crowds and not to endure other people's bullshit, especially being subject to vicious rumours and back-stabbing. This poem is my confession to having an anti-social temperament.

STYLISTIC INFLUENCES

Get your eyes and attention-span ready for this:

Etheridge Knight [the late, great Black prison poet]—for his straight-forward, sometimes profane nature on the page; Langston Hughes; Countee Cullen; Claude McKay; Gil Scott-Heron; Lucille Clifton; Amiri Baraka; Haki R. Madhubuti; Mumia Abu-Jamal [the Pennsylvania state political prisoner/news reporter]—for his ability to extract truth from the State's/Mass Media's lies; Janice Mirikitani [the San Francisco Japanese

poet]—for standing up for her people; George Jackson [the late San Quentin politicised prisoner]—for giving my people on the outside wisdom about themselves, in the face of a racist society; Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Neeli Cherkovski, Maxine Kumin—for teaching me to appreciate the natural world through verse; Diane DiPrima; Frederick Douglass; the song-lyrics of Ice Cube; MC Ren; KRS-One; Robb Flynn [from Machine Head]; Burton C. Bell [from Fear Factory]; Trent Reznor [from Nine Inch Nails and How To Destroy Angels]; Valor Kand [from

Christian Death]; and William Faith [from Faith & The Muse and The Bellwether Syndicate].

WHY POETRY?

Because it's not only my creative outlet, but a way for me to communicate myself and my observations to our greater society.

I don't have a ready-made human family of my own [wife, children and household pets]. So everything I've created on the page are my children and that's the legacy I want to leave behind after I leave this wretched mortal coil. A full, published/posted body of written work.

AUTHOR'S BIO: African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California.

Active on the creative writing & Spoken Word tips since the early 1990s. Author of 5 books [*Boneyard*, *Unwritten Law*, *Stormwater* and *Skeletal Black*, all from

POOR Press, and coming soon from Conviction 2 Change Publishing, *Elohi Unitsi*] and 24 anthology appearances [including *Your Golden Sun Still Shines, Rise, Extreme, The Land Lives Forever* and *Civil Liberties United*, edited by Shizué Seigel] under his figurative belt so far.

