

*Kerry Nicholson*

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**Side Show Sestina**

I walk through popcorn-littered alleyways to see the reptile  
show

and one hairy wolf spider as promised.

The sign said it only feeds at night

and being the carnivorous breed they

are, will bite your finger down to a stub

if you come too close. Reptile-

like men slither and grind cigarette stubs.

Holding kewpie dolls in one hand they

promise

me I'll win at dart games and show

me blue precision bullseyes tonight.

Those straw-chewing carnies reek promises

of stale whiskey and paper ticket stubs.

I try to play their carnival games but when night

descends the neon lights reflect and they

reach for my quarter with reptile

scales growing on their work-beaten hands showing

me I do not belong here this night.

But I am fixed like a reptile

ready to strike at the stub

of this hick's worn down fingers as they

reach to trade money for darts and I promise

I will win and show

these country carnival freaks they  
cannot break promises  
and still show  
their faces when light breaks through this night.  
The sun will shrivel their reptile  
skin and their majestic tents will look like stubs

from the city skyscrapers. They  
will pack their empty dart game promises  
and their mouse circus trailer shows.  
Then the cotton candy-haired, stub-  
fingered man will carry his reptiles  
along with his carnival home into another night.

And again those sideshow reptiles will promise  
plastic spider rings to the waiting to show they  
will receive your fork-tongued stub to spend in their night.

**1975**

I could close one,  
sleepy, 5 year-old eye  
and still stare at  
melted 7-up bottles;  
the green glass twisted into  
a wave of distortion,  
marking the acid-ridden  
bell-bottomed-time  
I lived in.

Didn't every child  
own a smiling white skull,  
made with love  
out of crude plaster  
by motorcycle-greased fingers?  
Mine sat on the shelf  
next to my psychedelic bottles.

My brother gave them to me.  
I can barely remember  
his face then.  
Covered with beard, moustache and  
hair on his head,  
longer than mine.  
He put Sgt. Pepper's Lonely  
Hearts Club Band  
next to the Disney Disco album  
on my phonograph.

I rode in his micro bus  
and played miniature golf.  
In his kitchen,  
I was mesmerized by a can  
of Kangaroo tail soup,

always afraid  
we would eat it.  
Playing with his  
petrified piranha,  
I was never aware of  
its teeth cutting  
on the edge  
of my mini-skirt.