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“The Next Thing Always Belongs”: Automatic Poetry Exercise

Here it is: the amazing, do-it-yourself, just add water collage poem based on the following instructions! This assignment is inspired by Richard Hugo, author of *The Triggering Town*, essays on poetry writing. In the book he writes, “[M]ost people are like me, I find/. The longer they talk about one subject, the duller they get. Make the subject of the next sentence different from the subject of the sentence you just put down. Depend on rhythm, tonality, and the music of language to hold things together. It is impossible to write meaningless sequences. In a sense, the next thing always belongs.”

Read the instructions below and follow to create your poem. Each instruction corresponds roughly to a single line of your poem, though you will want to be careful to vary your phrasing and sentence structure, and not end-stop all of your lines. (See enjambment in your poetry dictionary, if you don’t understand this.) One additional guideline: though you will probably not make any logical sense in this poem, try to have an emotional, thematic or situational unity in the poem.

1. Use the proper noun of a person or place
2. An image involving the sense of hearing
3. Something embarrassing that happened to you
4. A fact you’ve read in a textbook or encyclopedia
5. Any simile
6. Any line using the word “bone”
7. A line beginning “Who knew”
8. A bit of conversation you overheard recently
9. A line beginning “I want”
10. Say something absurd you wish was true
11. An image involving an animal
12. A line with a quirky item found in the supermarket
13. Use a slang word you’ve never seen in a poem
14. Write about a subject that doesn’t belong in any poem
15. Contradict something you’ve already written
16. Any question
17. An image involving something you might find in a garage
18. A line mentioning a relative of yours
19. Any metaphor
20. A line beginning “I can’t stop...”
21. A line involving a specific part of the body
22. A line with a series of three nouns, connected by commas
23. Refer to someone famous
24. Use a vivid image that echoes something you’ve already mentioned
25. Write a line in command form.