

2018 Roger M. Jones Poetry Content
First Place: Yan Zhang

Corrida De Toros

I have felt it before
the feeling of 'Corrida De Toros'
where the fate of death
awaits in the sharp steel stick

and I have tried to live
pounding the floor with my very fists
and no matter
how hard I thrust my horns

my back leaked blood
heavy with failures
and it's weird how people say
"let go"

when instead you have to carry it
while you walk forward
head high, straight back,
despite the heaviness in your chest

for life is a solo waltz,
an unending performance,
where one can train for a year
and dance better than others
who have waltzed for centuries

for it is experience
not time
that define the very profession
of living

so off I went to the others
numbness of failure still fresh
jobs for the "overall intelligent"
(and despite being "underly insignificant")
ran through them like jolly fool

hair slicked to the neck
dress being second skin
may people not only see the swing of hips
and thin arms

but the explosive steps
straight, 350 degrees bent back
thrashing my neck sharply to the tango
fingers clacking and rough

with charcoal, dirt, and oil markings
neck bent low until tendons stretched
joints crooked,
feet bruised from heels

I turn my neck sharply
even though blood jolts
waterfalls in every tendon
from the gums to my nails

and I knew
there is no way
I can win
without taking risks

so be it, let them strike!
for I'll run half dead
even with a bleeding brain
butchered up heart and burnt skin

“come to me! kill me! I dare you!”
let them have every morsel of me
and throw me into the very pits
but I shall stand

for even a moment
when I run through everything
to the point where
I have nothing

I have everything

A Prayer

In the hall of pianists,
tension enough to make
the hair of my neck
stand on the very ends,
and everyone knew just from breathing
this was a hall of war

“Entry No.38, please step in”

The moment I walked in
ten pairs of eyes stared

a raise of pen
a trumpet blare

Then it started
where I touched just one note,
but the most important,
to me,
a beginning of a letter

For the 17 years I have lived
I have felt it, the way dirt deeply embeds under
my nails, as I scrape edges of hell
just to find reasons to keep living,
to keep standing, to breath.

and while others may wish for money
success or fame,
for once I decided to pray.

Even though my phone that still
has his name in my contacts
will never ring,
and his voice will never come,

somehow my childish self fooled me to believe
all pianos are cups with strings connected to heaven
and maybe, just maybe
he might hear me.

I pranced around the keyboard
eyes closed, feeling vibrations against my eyelids
cradling the deep, dark G minor

in my very veins,
the very ones I inherited,
which failed to stop the balloon of blood,
a fatal, silent ticking time bomb,
within my father's head.

And he fell...
I saw him sit
behind my eyelids
where he questioned:

"Why do you play the piano?"

and it was this moment,
even though I may be speaking
a dead language of latin
I played for him, father.

But most importantly
I was thinking how wonderful it would be
to tell him before he left
mother is doing well,
and so is little Layton.

Climbing up the stairs made of chords
I play to send a message to the heavens
screaming with all my might
like childish rebellion

how I hope he didn't think
I didn't try my best
and I really tried until I
felt like I would die and join him

but I will not
because mother is at home
and there is food
to bring to the table.

and when I finished
the last ringing note of my prayer
a thin film of salt
layered the collar of my silk dress

I felt the flower petals in the plain, dusty room

where wind sneaked through the glass window
and for one moment-
and just for that one moment

I see one man,
a familiar man,
in the corner of my right eye
smiling faintly from the corner

did he hear it?

maybe my ears were deaf
perhaps my eyes were blind
but when I turned,
the second hand of time
began to move once more
and there were only ten living beings
scrawling in their shiny black pens

and when I walk off the stage,
I walk forward, bowing low,
for there is food to be cooked
and mother is waiting at home.

Mother

Across her face
was a youth hidden
of naive happiness

hair flowing years ago
against the salted airs
of California

many men she could have picked
but she chose father
where he loved her
even though across her skin

the nebula of rashes
then maturity of vitiligo
white fungus and spores
grew and took home
across her eyes and hands

she brings somehow
a feast to the table
of rich red lobsters, and ever green
fresh water lettuce
and nevertheless starves

where her non-blind eyes
sees her thin daughter's face
mirroring hers
but pupils and eyelids of
her dead lover

and brother
where he is young
with thin bones outlying
his chest and back
yet to resemble anyone

and she finds it funny
she isn't hungry
for she is obese with happiness
just by seeing us

and that
is the gift
of being a mother

Before I Die

The times
when I come home
sheets hung out in the sun to dry
crisp white paper on the desk
and past email logs
makes my life so
black and white.

So I painted the world

where I will run
over the fields
over the train tracks
where the big castle
laputa hovers

I dig in the sandbox
that contains the blue sky
where little seagulls chirp
and the Brooklyn bridge lie

When I go out the balcony
I see milky ways clashing
and stars bursting
with nuclear wings of pink

and I would travel
on fast rotating tops

“jump!”

and I remember grabbing
out my heart
and found
the sun in my hands
and I would look at
the other planets swirl

When I sky dived
between two cloud walls
a slip of green in the distance
I remember flying faster
than earth's tears
so I caught them

I will run amongst
the swarms of fish
the bottle nosed dolphins
and large blue whales
just right under the surface
of the water
upside down

and when I was
on the edge of flat earth
I was witness to
the earth kissing saturn

I am a fire
running on water
I am the nuclear
planes
that fly amongst the birds

even times
I lift my hood
and breath heavy mist
out into the pine forest

and something I
discovered
was how color
chokes dullness

and even though
the world may seem so chaotic
it is still ever
so beautiful

A Request

You are the girl
and I'm your umbrella
shielding you while
watching you grow,
laugh, fail, and succeed.

And even though
you may not be there in the end,
I will sleep peacefully
in replaying the old films

and sometimes
make false memories of us
growing old together

where I will teach you
to cook rice
and you will bring me
cake on my birthday.

the real ones
where I feel your hand
when the spring breeze
whispers through my hair

through the grey shirt,
my time machine,
I will lay my head
against your heart

against you
whose innocent eyes
that seemed to dance
the parade of planets

And the moment when I touch
the fine line between life and death
may a soft hearted creator
grant my simple, yet selfish desire
to run to you at full speed.

Even if it is just a millisecond of seeing you,
even if I may be buried 10 feet below the ground,
even if you may have fallen for someone else,

may I be by your side once more.