

2013 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
First Place: Hannah Cheriyan

Learning

Listen,
I wish you would let me
Envelop you in song, as I used to.
You wouldn't remember
 (or do you?
 Deep down,
 Half-forgotten whispers
 That were once music
 That were once me)
But I sang to you most nights.

He never hurt me more than the day he told me
That my voice was deep enough to frighten you.

(You do not fear the deep, though
Do not fear anything that I know of, really
And you are quick to laugh me out of my fears
 For a moment)

I longed for the day you would sing
With me. You'd
Soar, effortlessly fluttering through the highest cadenzas,
And finally my voice would have scales to
Twine itself through-
Liquid gold harmonies weaving between crystalline grace notes.

Sometimes you do sing, but you scorn my harmonies.
 (Why? Don't you know,
 Or are you yet to learn,
 The reason I submerge myself in thirds and fifths?)

Instead,
Your fingers dance,
Tickling the ivories, caressing the strings, erupting in brassy fanfares,
Releasing the music that pumps through your veins
 (And who am I to change your song?
 And how would I know I was wrong?).

Oh, dear heart,
Take this music (with my blessing), live this music.
Follow the notes to heaven's door,
 And bring back the songs of the seraphim to us.

Play on,
For I will always
Listen.

This is Not a Metaphor

You know, don't you?

(Hello again.)

That I am not exactly a

(Because I cannot stop to think,

The mundane clogs my kitchen sink)

Poet.

You see

(I am choking on an overdose of irony and green leaves)

Many of them are made all out of

Simpering love, airy footfalls, far-flung floral bouquets,

Or else

Stifling passion, dark damask cloaking a tear-soaked flame.

(Just a day of wet sunlight,

Soon absorbed into the dark ink of night)

And I?

I am of water, suspended in the hush and weightlessness

Of refracted light.

(My wings, they shine

With the glint of aluminum

And the smooth, burnished glow

Of colored pencils)

You have heard, too often, perhaps,

(The haunting, emerald music of my soul)

The lovely words, the worn-out weary phrases.

Sometimes they tell stories

(Teach the girl to take her dreams,

And out of them a ribbon weave).

These are not

My stories.

So what have I to offer?

(And perhaps the clouds are reality,

And we are floating

Underwater)

Wonder

(A trumpet fanfare, sounding loud,

Heralds the rising blooms of sun)

Music

(Youth is not an age,

But a feeling

And I was young)

And truth.

Take them, if you will.
For these I know,
(‘Til we write again,
Don’t you?

Prayer

Running the course along this
Barren, chapped skinscape
And waiting for the inevitable opportunity
To bow. Again,
Loose the rain,
For what?
How many times can a word, a feeling,
Be cried out before it loses
All
Meaning?
But each time as sincere as the last.

The debt of love is hardest to repay

So play away, play away,
Oh give me scorn anyday
But yet- not so, says the self, not so,
For you are wonder, your breath: music, your thoughts
Stars
And you know I am yet a child.

I would that I could be brave, but
The tales told me to rely on my (nonexistent) strength
While you remind me, patiently,
That I must learn to float before I can swim

(I have always loved to swim).

And I know, deepest of my knowings,
That I am bound to you inextricably, o
Author of my every story.
Will I ever find your plot? Perhaps
But for now I am content with this
Bit of libretto.
I will, I will, I will-
Or rather,

Here am I, with my
Bit of love,
A drop of rain adoring the ocean.

Identity

I am a dreamer
A wisher, a waiter,
A poetry singer,
A melody painter
A still-hopeful, ever-
Ready understudy
A face in the mirror,
A rose not yet ruddy

I am a voice of
A new found narration
A descant, a discord,
A still-flawed creation,
A possible hero,
A more likely goat,
A symbolic shadow,
A windless sailboat

I am the one
You will never see cry
I am the rain
While the sun shines on high
I am the moon
With a faint orange hue

I am the dreamer
Whose dreams do come true.

The Song Within

I wish that I could take my heart
And squeeze 'til it runs dry
Then with this ink to fill a page
With music, I would try

But how can one transcribe the tune
That plays throughout one's soul,
The song emerging part by part
Yet never heard in whole?

The heart begins the symphony
With drums that never cease
A cello joins, an undertone
In golden notes of peace

Trumpets herald victory
And all one's dreams will sing
An eight-part harmony of joy
As bells of laughter ring

A clarinet begins to cry
Of fears that sorrow brings
Cymbals clash, and hope returns
An epiphany of strings

In angry and persistent tones
The drums and brass will shove
The crooning French horn drowns them out
With melody of love

And on and on life's music plays,
Yet still the song will prod
A flute and timpani duet
That sings to us of God