

2013 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest  
Fourth Place: Kelly Edinger

**shattered shell**

he knelt and prayed.  
he offered up all that he was  
all that he would ever be.  
day after day he smoothed the rough cheeks,  
shaped the lips,  
brightened the almond eyes with desire,  
gave beauty to the damp clay of the earth.  
and his lonely heart beat so loudly in his chest  
that he could not turn from those eyes -  
those haunted, soul-empty eyes -  
pouring all his waking and dreaming hours  
into his masterpiece.  
so when he turned  
turned to his sweetly-still love  
and saw how *it* became *she*  
a heart-breakingly lovely form of flesh  
from the soil and the dirt and the dust...  
well, he wept.

she looked to the heavens.  
“O rapturous blue! O flighted thing  
That wheels upon the sun’s own wing!  
What I would give to dive and soar.  
My love, I see there’s so much more  
Than chains of soil, than bonds of clay  
Than stillness in both night and day.  
To sing and cry and dance and scream...  
For even souls of silence dream.  
You see, the last thing I could aspire to be  
Is your slave of living pottery.”

she pushed his arms away.  
all he breathed for was the taste of her lips.  
all he needed was her smooth hands  
her long legs  
her silken silhouette,  
the crookedness of her mouth  
learning to smile.  
but now that she had a self,  
buried inside her was a flame of freedom  
and the smell of sweet grass  
rippling in the wind, green as the  
ocean hit by rays of sun.  
she struggled.  
seeing red

he knew not a net in the world could catch her.  
hammer met sculptor halfway  
and it worked its careless witchcraft  
on clay, on skin, on bone.  
in the moments between breathing and broken  
the very soul was smashed  
and broom in bitter hand  
with the despair of a creator who has lost  
something time-consuming,  
a divine work of art,  
he began to sweep up the red-splattered pieces of pottery.

## **Beyond Traditional Boundaries!!**

the surprise of the sun at seven in the morning  
blindingly crisp snow crunches white.  
sneaking into the theater and finding yourself  
holding your breath  
on a dark, empty stage. the echoes of performance.  
the weight of one hundred thousand people screaming  
the bloodlust of the game, the fame.  
multitudes of stairwells  
every closet an un-space.  
fluorescent lighting illuminates your every smudge.  
Friday nights driven by a bassline.  
wet floors of the bus, slick stops, stomping off snow.  
faces slipping into the crowd.  
the sheer panic of the first all-nighter, your name becomes a blur.  
duct tape, always.  
falling asleep to the ghost glow  
of your first roommate's flat screen tv.  
approximately ten minutes of spring  
roll down a hill into endless sloth of summer.  
enough with the Pythagorean Theorem already.  
a moment of clarity when you find  
for the first time  
you are finally alone  
drowning in your own "now what?"  
the ever-present smell of someone else's coffee.  
electricity runs rampant  
in your spinal fluid  
when catching the eyes of a stranger across a room  
where it's too loud to hear.  
never, ever remembering your stapler.  
every basement a labyrinth.  
grasping a bucket, she throws up into it seven times  
and each time it's orange.  
treadmills humming beneath the thump of footsteps at the gym, 1 am.  
acronyms for a thousand things you've never heard of.  
learning to plan things out very carefully  
and ten percent of the time, giving up entirely.  
the train, insistent, at 3 am, screaming and cursing at the tracks.  
there is no peer pressure, no  
"come on, just try it once, it's so fun...!"  
merely shrugs. if you don't step up  
the parade will pass you by without hesitation.  
the curtain drops.

## to the Boy i met at that party

it was laughably easy.  
my prey, i smelled your blood in the water.  
you lined up the shot for me -  
for the last few hours, it was nearly as if i'd been waiting  
for someone like you.  
you opened with drunken criticism of my beer pong game,  
eyeing every inch of me (slowly), made it clear you didn't think i could keep up with the  
Boys.  
(here i was supposed to show flirtatious indignation  
blush a little  
try to prove myself  
give you my phone number)  
instead, i snapped.  
over and over, you were rude.  
you actually called me a little Girl and made the unforgivable mistake  
of assumption.  
don't be fooled - see that beneath my  
mascara, jewelry, and little green dress  
i am a pitbull.  
the Rosie-the-Riveter in me was likely to blacken your eye at some point  
but the razor edge of my tongue got to you first.

for what it's worth,  
i'm sorry that i ripped you to shreds.  
for what it's worth,  
i'm not sorry at all.  
your particular brand of sexist condescension  
and not-so-subtle eye-rolling  
doesn't work on a Girl who won't drink a drop  
and isn't afraid to try and attract the opposite sex  
by acting intelligent.  
mind-blowing, isn't it  
that i could attend that party  
and not be flattered and astounded  
that such a desirable individual like you  
would deign to speak to helpless little me.  
plath knew what She was talking about  
when She penned the words "I eat Men like air."  
i got a sick thrill  
from the deer-in-the-headlights expression  
that wiped that smug smile off of your face.

you were at a disadvantage from the first:  
i was raised with one older Brother  
who showed no mercy in snowball fights,  
nor arguments, nor monopoly.  
my major is more than 90% Male,  
my current athletic hobby and my first real job were exactly the same.

they told me not to be a little Bitch when i burnt my hands at work.  
they told me to try and keep up and for god's sake, be a Man.  
i am sick of this patriarchy  
where i must be attractive to have value,  
of the system that encourages you to place me beneath you.  
i am sick of Boys like you  
who think i will be easy to toy with.  
i'm sickened by the crude, arrogant behavior  
that so often makes Girls afraid to walk home alone at night.  
they will call me a Man-eater  
for verbally flaying you within an inch of your life.  
and they will be right.  
hell, i enjoyed it.

## engine

we are dynamic, we are electric.  
as one  
pistons pumping  
the sweet steam  
the smell of coal.  
grinding gears, forging  
paths,  
metals,  
the human cosmos.  
we are cogs, forcing motion.  
it is a race, the flames of our  
conquering  
licking our blackened feet.  
our ashes? our ashes are CERTAINTY  
because we are the Blessed children  
the fighting force  
the strength of conviction.  
we were born to shape the world in OUR image.

and then I fear, I awake  
from these nightmares where the faceless cry  
“you are not *enough* of anything.”  
oh, but  
Icarus child,  
you don't just throw yourself  
off the crow's nest.  
you don't just swan dive  
off the hood of a tank.  
you will be crushed to death, trampled -  
splinters of white eggshells  
your fragile little bones could be.  
the young and alive and immortal -  
we forget that we are trapped in temporary little shells.  
the world turns a little faster every day  
and the safest place to be  
is in the silent, terrifyingly calm eye  
of the hurricane.  
you may never leave the machine.

you may NEVER leave the machine.  
“*but*,” my lips whisper  
my heart pounding defiantly away  
like it doesn't give a damn who hears it in the dead of night.  
*but*, when I fall from great heights  
I don't burn myself alive to fuel the great fires.  
I simply  
unfurl  
and my words are the feathers that lift me toward the sun.

there is a possibility that there is something  
glorious under my skin,  
and it is not heat, but sky, gentle and cool  
- the gazing pool that douses any spark that turns to flame.  
there is a possibility that I am art,  
that I have yet to become.  
there is a miraculous possibility  
that I was created to be miraculous.

yet we are the explosion, we are the flint and steel.  
we have destroyed everything that would get in our path  
because our smoke is divine, our fate written.  
we are the trigger, the catalyst.  
the collision.  
we are powerful, the Blessed creators. we dare.  
we are not afraid to watch it all burn.