

2012 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention: Emily Cizmas

Borrowed Time

before the shadow on my sundial was dizzy
and the cherry blossoms still slept tight in their buds
the world was mine
the fleeting moments when the stars and the sun both shine
[they've told me this is called twilight, but I've always called it magic],
my porcelain skin flawless as the vanity I admired it in
glitter, time, and the cherry blossoms
they were all mine and mine forever

but October set the trees ablaze, and they hastily shed their fiery cloaks,
revealing skeletons and the evanescence of life
and I learned that nothing lasts
I grew cold with the air, jealous of my precious possessions,
for I feared they would be taken away with the glow of summer
and the bare trees' charred robes
so I gathered my treasures and locked myself up in my castle
where October couldn't find me
[oh, how my cleverness dwarfed the trees!]

from behind the bars of my tower I saw life and laughed
How foolish they are! They will lose it all!

but slowly, no matter how closely I guarded my cherry blossoms,
gluttonous October snuck **past** my bars and made them shrivel,
blew my glitter away
no matter how many times I ran to my vanity and inspected

the empty face staring back at me,
my porcelain skin began to crack, no longer as the surface of my hourglass
whose grains of sand trickled down determinedly, faster and faster
for no amount of pleading could stop Gravity
or his evenly merciless brother, Time
and my sundial's shadow swept the scored numerals from its surface
or maybe it was the sand
as I learned that my castle, too, was made of sand
built by an naive child, unaware that the sea of time would wash it away
and I realized that my things were not mine at all
that my only possession was a transient gift of life, lived entirely on borrowed time

and so I left my sandcastle
descended the cold, clammy staircase, Gravity and Time helping me down,
for my legs were weak from imprisonment
when I reached the door I was afraid to open it, for I hadn't ever before seen the light
but then I smiled, for only now did I see
one may fear the dark, but how foolish it is to fear the light!
so I lowered the drawbridge across my moat that,
knowingly, had not withstood October
and breathed freedom for the first time

Helpless Even for a Title

I look out at the storm raging behind the glass
[note: violent; magnificent; certainly the stuff poetic mastery]
and I find myself, quite frankly, discouraged

I am discouraged, for will the expectant reader
want to be inspired? saddened? humored?
Will he be a fan of the spectacular vernacular
or of the short, choppy lines so abstract they
often slip through the green fingers of my mind
How could this I know?

I am discouraged because the ideas come too fast
they swoop in from every direction, graceful butterflies and stinging bees
so many, yet I cannot move fast enough to catch them all
as a frenzied child with a fishing net I capture so few
and many escape, never to be seen again
only passing visitors in the aspiring garden of my mind

I am discouraged because I lack that elusive cypher they call genius,
left hopeless to translate flashes into verses, howls to rhythm
mocked by the din, I feel the ridicule of the raindrops
as they mercilessly attack my window,
for I am not worthy to compose this angry song of the heavens

I am discouraged because my pencil has grown dull with my imagination
I am running out of metaphors, running out of time
since the clouds have grown tired of toying with me for now
the slow leak above me has gradually
drip. drip. drip.
washed the words from my paper, reminding me of the insignificance of my words

finally, I surrender to perfection
and leave to hunt for a rainbow
[feel free to join me]

Progress

they say we're civilized, that we've a thing called progress.
but I don't know.

I see imagination traded for conformity, a mass worship of the titles,
the aesthetics, of skin-deep delights, meaning and truth discarded
to leave room for pretty words and cheap illusions of beauty.
and what is beauty anyway? some shape, a color?
or is progress just beauty in work clothes?
must be, since both names so frequent these days,
loyal patrons of bulletin boards and
the renowned plastic surgeons of once-unattractive political tongues.
so if beauty=progress=everywhere, then surely beauty
is the ocean of sensations in which we are continually immersed:
perhaps the woman, emaciated and painted, in the pages of a magazine
on a little girl's nightstand
or the vivid tropical bird caged as a showpiece
frantically batting its clipped wings to the delight of the crowd.
how lovely, how welcome these delights are against
the ragged teachers who brave the squandered classrooms of today,
sit on street corners, on the bus, among us, begging,
“Freedom for a moment of your time,”
with the ears of those in this civilized place too saturated
with progress=beauty=everywhere to listen.
The beggars tire, powerless to draw the attention of those
who admire the elegantly painted sign at the entrance to this town that reads,
“Welcome to Gomorrah,” and the lush roses that adorn its post,
from which have been stripped the unsightly roots and thorns
[rubbish, eyesores respectively].
as Abraham frantically tends to the doomed petals,
acceptance is on sale at the shop down the street for the low price of identity,
and the pet store that sells the tropical birds in cages

displays in its window hamsters blissfully spinning their wheels.
and spinning.

and spinning....

Message in a Bottle

sing me a song of the beautiful things
the wondrous things
that young children dream of
[like the song a morning dove sings in spring]
of magical things, like horses with wings and the joy freedom brings
when the last of the schoolbells rings for the summer
sing me a song of these sweet nothings
these strange, foreign things
my heart was never young

tell me a story of love ever true
two hearts with life anew
no longer one, always two
of me and you
[forever]
of white dresses in June and whispered “I do”
two souls singing together as one
a song with beauty who
could woo even the lonely few who never speak of love
tell me of a love like no other love
my heart burns for you

write to me of the freedom you’ve gained
from the demons you’ve slain
I hear stories of you, and there’s fame in your name
[are you still the same?]
though you’ve broken your chains, mine remain
and the pain of each new day makes me pray you still remember
[me]

write me a message and send it to me in a bottle
my heart waits for you
[forever]

Anthem

you say I am only woman
and woman I may be
but my spirit is fiercer than any weapon you will ever bring to battle
my will shall outrun any brawn, my vision any skill, my callus any armor
yes, woman I am, and it is my strength
I will prevail

you say I am only young
but make you no mistake
I have learned what it means to stare into the abyss and see
myself
to listen to the stars, to laugh with trees, to run with time and never lose my breath
mine eyes have taken in the blackest perditions of this war-ravaged paradise
and donated enough tears to revive the barren deserts of our race
[if only deserts they were, not the hearts and minds of our kinsmen]
I have been the hostage of fear unlike any manacle ever forged in steel
and I have hunted it
conquered it
slain it
and the sustenance of its flesh keeps my life-blood rushing, gushing
and me the master of this beast
I, few in years, am wealthy in scars

you say I am only one
but these hands be the handiwork of myriad craftsmen who
sculpted from a crude lump of clay

a warrior
a new, fifth force called
hope
they gave me wings that I may fly above earthly citadels
blinders that I may not see impossible, only chance
fueled me with their ceaseless faith
sanctioned with the promise that their dreams
may no longer be relegated to the well-guarded alcoves of grounded imagination
that the dove found in possession of olive leaves
may no more be swiftly concealed behind bars of deceit
but let to sing its exquisite song across the wastelands and, resonating,
watch them flourish again
I am the product of this nation, an army of tireless sculptors
one
the one you will join
or die pursuing,
I am not the prey

you say I am no poet
in verse, I must concur
words from these hands be indelicate, unrefined
but it is no matter, for my life is my song
not these corporeal lines brutishly strewn across the dispatch you presently demean
all the while you rebuff my words and spend sun after moon,
moon after sun
perfecting your intricate lyrics, I spend improving
renewing

construing

so when we meet again, you with your impressive verse and I with my battle plan
may jargon, for your sake, be the strongest chainmail known to man

you say that I am beaten

and Heaven knows I've been

but no matter how many times I may fall, I will never break

I will never

never

surrender

as the Phoenix I *will* rise again

you say I can't

but oh

yes

I

can

I am more than this coarse flesh

I am luminous, a blossom

I am a survivor and

I am never going back

I am today

I am tomorrow

I am forever, for

I am me, and

I am We

in this great connected circle that knows no end

We, the believers in tomorrow, not in might but in *will*

We are the last of hope

as your brothers fall beside you in the quicksand of doubt
do not stumble over their vile corpses pleasuring in tempting rest
for they are relegated to a fate blacker than death
destiny unfulfilled, cause abandoned for the lowly sake of repose
if only they knew that their sleep shall be plagued with
the perpetual night of lament
and a death they will die each day
until, ashamed, they return, to the weary earth
the well-worn path of the vocal, idle witness
We, my brothers, shall know no such end
We are the promise
We are limitless, invincible
and We shall march forever toward that sunset,
that summit
that dream of our fathers and theirs
We will know no rest until the victory is won
[there will be time ample for that later
in the pasture of infinite lights]
so ready now, each to his station!

We are one from many parts! for the

boom-boom-boom

of the drum that you feel is the

boom-boom-boom

of Our hearts