

**2011 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest  
First Prize: Lian Zhu**

**Sisyphus Running Away**

We should run away today  
Because I've already decided  
That words mean nothing now.  
Cadenances, oh the richness of human fire-glazed pottery,  
They lay in shards, how they've turned dusty and gray  
Like cheap inked words on yellowing paper.

I want to run away today,  
To blue skies and pottery wheels,  
To rich, oily breads under paling red umbrellas  
And birds racketeering on cobbled streets,  
To eggs and the smell of morning,  
Operatic tunes humming through the air like bees,  
Images falling together like white sheets on a line.

Let's run away today,  
Because I am trying too hard to speak  
And want so badly to sing,  
To get lost in careless metaphors, pirated sincerities,  
Meaningless breaks of the lines,  
Ridiculous stops.  
I'm trying for a melody,  
But all I can manage is this steady beat,  
Me in a red blazer,  
So solid now in facts,  
But missing the inexactness of humanity, those bursts of emotion.

Sisyphus, how you toiled, how you must have condemned your condemnation.  
But I wonder, as you climb again and again,  
If you feared stepping down from your mountain and the rock  
That was your life,  
If you feared stepping down  
And living again  
And feeling again  
Like before, a laughing boy with much too vigilant eyes.

## Anvils

Slowly fading to remnants of myself,  
Ponderous thoughts just get too heavy  
And kid, I think they're falling too fast.

Yes I'm talking about the colors,  
The hues and smears, they keep changing this cathedral,  
They keep on dancing in this cathedral.  
The pieces of stained glass drowning light in the sunlight,  
Echoing tales in the moonlight,  
Dyeing light in the day, now night  
Reawakening with Virgilian echoes of another moonlit place.

And on this white pillow my head hangs and hugs, thoughts glazed messily  
Like pottery painted by merchants posing as artists  
Busily tallying up their days wins and losses  
Their surplus and their deficits  
The conquered parts of the day and those coveted parts that still wander free.

I think of pages fluttering, strips and lines cut from  
Newspapers and books, ribbons of thoughts like confetti  
That I shredded, and read over and over  
Pressing them into pages,  
Pressing them into my memory,  
A nimble girl,  
On the carpet of my grandfather's library.

How light were those strands of words,  
And how heavily do my words now fall from my mouth  
Sinking down into an abyss.

These days, I struggle and fight, cruelly wrestle  
With time  
Dropping heavy thoughts like anvils  
On its elusive form  
I tell myself I refuse to lose words,  
To lose minutes, smiles, loves of a lifetime, to see  
Decades pass in seconds, a day dying flame-like in a minute.  
But still I feel it happening, the colors keep on dancing, changing,  
Fading from that outlandish shade of purple  
To a kind of washed away gray that the light drowns in,  
In which pieces of stained glass gasp for air.

But when all the anvils are gone,  
And time still hovers over me perplexedly, formlessly,

When I see that I can't do all I wanted,

Or collect all those things that I sought,  
When it looks down at my heaving form,  
And wistfully smiles,  
Crinkling its eyes, saying,  
With its eyes,  
Oh kid, calm down,

Then and only then, will I quietly seek again those missing fragments,  
Gather those pieces that I had tossed aside in my anxiety,  
Pieces of clipped lines  
Folded between ancient volumes that smell of home.

And then I will think of this advice for you kid,  
Because honestly, I think that I am losing this battle with time,  
Losing because I've spent all my time fighting with anvils,

Because, I am only fading faster to remnants of myself,  
And some ponderous thoughts are just too heavy  
And kid,  
They fall much too fast.

## Pascal

Sunlight appears like a dream to me  
Fractals of light  
From the library that Pascal  
Liked to bury himself in  
When the night became too dark  
And the stars, flares of something, were too far away,  
Like the friends that wait for the sun  
And the dawn of a new day to call  
Each other through their open windows and to hear  
The sound of voices  
Filling the air.

Time,  
Important yet trivial  
To us, we who fill the vacuum with  
Words, and sounds, and eons upon eons  
Of life, rich and green, so unlike  
The space, the stars  
At which we gaze  
when we are weary of this world.

Weariness,  
I have a fear of exhaustion and I believe  
That Pascal did too,  
A fear of letting yourself give up and go  
Evaporating, disappearing,  
Losing the strands of comprehension and the scribbles  
He spent half of his life on.

But no, our lives are entwined yours and mine  
And as much as this poem is meaningless and  
Illogical. As much as perhaps  
It reads like random words strung together, like random notes  
Lying across bars, waiting to be struck and  
To resound.

It rings of sincerity, I hope, and a certain truth  
Because now it is late  
And the stars, far away,  
And here I am in a point  
Buried in an infinite space  
and taking a moment to breathe,  
To look out and see the spread of lights below  
and wonder at  
How Pascal knew that the crowded streets  
Flood with too many thoughts

And the only escape  
Lies in conjuring words  
And provoking reason  
When it is wanted the least of all.  
How he knew that time floods the streets  
And washes away those masses  
Of emotion, the reason  
That reason knows not of.

## **I Know Nothing Of Poetry At All**

I know nothing of poetry at all,  
Nothing of colors, of painting emotions, of wildly smearing  
Blues and reds across a pale marble statue,  
Finally giving it the layer of wetness it needs to breathe.

I have no clue which adjectives to use,  
Or where to place them, how to decorate an empty page,  
To somehow brighten dull hallways  
Like paper lanterns on a concrete path.

(I'm that girl who puts your daisies in closets,  
and stuffs pictures down the cookie jar.)  
I can't sound out words  
Forming them with my mouth, filling the emptiness with cello sonatas,  
Can't conjure lyrics that float, light like a whisper on a pillow,  
Reassuring words that wrap your exhausted form,  
And sirens it to sleep.

Nor I'm afraid am I truly able to drum up a beat, a beat falling  
Steadily in step to your pulse, I cannot,  
I will not, am not about to,  
Make it sound like poetry.  
Because all I have are these words, blunt like the closing of a door,  
Explicit.

So finally I have to tell you, dear,  
I know nothing of line breaks.

Of when to  
Stop and discontinue,  
To take off in a new direction, a new page, a new plot,  
A new climax, with new falling actions, failing words succeeding unexpectedly  
And a deus ex machina  
The likes of which you've never seen.

Of when to find a new paragraph.  
When to break off, break up  
Lines of words, meaningless conjunctions, obtuse analogies,  
Lists.

I know nothing of poetry at all  
My mouth, these lines, these words  
Are full of something, something dense and wet,  
And I wanted to write you, draw you, paint you,  
Full of glorious reds and sunrise yellows,  
But the thing is, love,

I know nothing of love at all.

## Not Enough Noise

In a subway station,  
She screams,  
Endless words pulling away from nonsensical logic.  
But I am not here to feel your pounding emotion  
Not here to miss the blue skies with you.

His eyes blaze and burn down to ashes, black and charred  
And I turn away from your diseased looks  
Turn away from your bare footed starvation.

Her hands plead, brown like leather, hints of blue pulsing and dilating  
They drum on the worn out tile  
But I won't dance this dance for you  
Won't dance and sprinkle coins into your coffin

Here,  
He laughs and smiles, a boy king among music and red cups,  
A white polo jersey with nudging dark blue stripes  
"You're like a million miles away right now, aren't cha?"  
I am.

She nods, a quick smile, an assent, a placid glance,  
Dark eyes framed by dark hair,  
A molecule spinning, a factoid, a girl in a gray shirt  
She is seeing other things right now,  
Drumming testaments, a sunrise somewhere far away.

She used to see sunsets too, like in the subway station,  
But they were just too striking, too much ending a line  
And not beginning one.  
They were too much ghastly silence,  
and not enough song, not enough noise.