

2010 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Fourth Prize: Lian Zhu

Brief Wondrous Lives

Writing is deciding who you are
And delving deep
Diving, flinging yourself sleekly
Into the calm waves filled to the depths with
Fractals, light and blue like the Greek sea
And the oceans of reflections which Odysseus traversed.

But the moment before the dive
Your toes cling to the rough layers of stone
And you feel the sand awkwardly between your toes
And you think about just how chilly the water is
And how there is nothing to prove by jumping in,
No audience to inspire,
No eager waiting faces in the water to be inspired by.

But yet you jump, dive, fly
Exhilarating in your brief wondrous life
As this creature who sinking, soars
By the attraction of gravity
To this watery sky of blue,
Translucent at the surface but deep,
Beauty in its elemental form,
The simplicity of its fractals giving it glorious gravity,
Pulling you in.

The rush of water, the rush of words
Of difficulties, of familiarities, of a friendly face next to a water fountain,
Of worlds that we have misplaced,
Friendships found and left behind,
Words lost,
Stolen by a brief look onto the horizon.

Brief wondrous lives.
Those are the lives that we lead
Like Odysseus
Yearning for the homeland,
Waves of emotion cascading through our limbs
As we look towards the horizon,
The sea flowing beneath our very core,
A reflection of a face

In our mind
And a pen grasped tightly in our hands.

Physics and Poetry

The night pulls in.
Plastered spheres of light held together
By wax and woven string
Hangs and sways from the vast dark rooftops.
I pull out my physics notebook,
Trying to calculate hastily in my mind,
The electric field encompassed by an infinite sheet
Of light, of tiny, impossibly small, spheres of charge.

Equations are scrawled onto the paper,
Realizations rippling out with black ink,
Even though doing physics with pen
Means making permanent mistakes,
Errors that you can't press
Backspace or erase
Like you can with words on a page.

But there is also something satisfying
In forgetting
Every once in a while,
About mistakes
And boldly, lovingly, stretching
Out
And brushing the infinite sheet of points
Eyes closed,
Imagining what it would be like
To feel the rush of infinite stars
Through your outstretched fingers,
Blowing sparks against your cheeks.

There is a silence, a sense of a stolen breath
In really seeing the stars, heavy with their own gravity
And vast, in a way that we hardly know.
They have to exist in a whole different realm of scale.

But despite how great the difference, how far the journey.
While the connection
With these stars, with physics
Will perhaps never be something
As close as the understanding look of a friend

Or as simple as words flowing beautifully across a page,
Despite all this,
There still exists an ethereal connection,
A beautiful richness of thought felt by falling through stars
By flying through the gravity of thousands and thousands of rushing lights.

The rush of movement,
Is like being on a train as it hastily pulls out
Of the station, its headlights puncturing the darkness.
It's like that of the writer thrusting her hand around in her leather bag
Feeling for that pen that she was so sure she had thrown in,
Because the night has finally pulled in,
And all those infinite points are calling
Like sirens
The pen to paper.

Losing Yourself

It's a rhythm, that you sink into
Spiraling into the beat as if you were being spun in your
White skirt layered with blues and
A little gray, look how gracefully the flaps of his jacket spin.

It's not an art, nor a skill that you need
To perfect, because it's not like losing a black umbrella
Or your keys on some hasty gray morning. It's colors
Mixing, spinning on a palate,
And you, suddenly unsure if the regal reds
Belong with the maddening yellows.
You, the one wearied of the chaotic fading of sunsets.

I now pause before statues in the park,
Thinking that I can decipher in their worn stony glance
A lesson that will breed conviction.
That from their faces yearning for something
Perhaps to turn and see a sunrise
Someday,
I can discover the joy of knowing myself again.

Because losing yourself is like forgetting a familiar phrase
From a beloved book,
One which lying quietly, hidden away, you no longer have time
To linger
Over, to feel the soft leather on the tips of your fingers.
Because it feels too much

Like trying to piece together fragments of a sunrise
But instead only finding
Drops of sunset falling like fiery sparks as you spin.

Poetry is About Pretension

Poetry is about pretension.
About stealing Borges' maps
Under the cover of originality.
It is about faking innocence
To make a contradiction poignant.
For what is more believable than a truth uttered
By a voice that knows not motive?

It is about pretending to misplace things,
Memories
And then pretending the heartache
When those things
Are dug up from the ruins of a willful heart.
As if some memories can truly be forgotten.

It's blue eyes staring at the night,
Seeming not to know their power
While calling, like sirens, flecks of gold from his hair.

It's like a thief, brandishing some heavy weapon
And dragging out of the reader something of value,
A rusted artifact perhaps,
That they had painfully buried within the pulsing tissues of their heart.

Poetry is pretension.
Simple, so elegant.
A voice
Singing
Beautifully, so it seems,
As it prowls in between the lines
Hunting for the thing that it yearns for
But will never admit.

Burning Bridges

Today

I crossed the bridge,
One of those arching bridges of my childhood,
And muttered a serpentine sentence
With contortions of my tongue.

I was cursing the stealth
Of yesterday's tomorrows
Of how they steal away
Parts and pieces of me
Like little pieces of glass
Scuttling through a slightly opened window
Taking with them the bits of a reflected dream on a
sleeping face.

Burning bridges.
Wasn't that a phrase you liked?
One that you said softly, without looking me in the eye,
As you placidly stirred the cream into your coffee,
The snow blanketing the cold city.

But it is not you that I am thinking of
As I hesitate on this wooden bridge,
The sunrise reflecting red on the water,
Like fire enclosed in floating pieces of glass.

It is my homeland,
Not the one on my birth certificate,
Nor the one in pictures of a younger me,
Rolling around on my grandfather's Persian carpet,
But rather a place of words,
A library of thoughts, sunlight streaming and illuminating
Triangles on the leather spines of books,
On the sprawled legs of a young foolish girl,
Grinning carelessly as she tumbles around scattered, open books and into worlds
That she doesn't completely understand,
But is trying to.
Her absolute favorite thing is conversing with the eager characters
Strolling in and out of the lines.

So you see, friend, it is not the burning of bridges,
But rather the burning of Alexandria's library.
The fire licking the spines and the edges
Before consuming the pages,

Tasting the delicacy of ink in its mouth.

The characters are all dying,
Gasping for breath,
In a death none of them had imagined.
And the girl stands outside, staring at the windows, red with fire,
Watching the glass crack and break and
Reflections of her face contort.

So you, with emphatic contortions of
Your tongue,
Whisper, "you're burning a bridge."
Your breath hot on my ear,
As I try to say goodbye.
As if I haven't seen enough beautiful arching bridges,
Or fire and its haunting reflections.

You, sitting here in your warm sweater, in this snow covered city,
Don't realize that I know all too well
How connections and bridges fade with the passing of time and how fires
Come prowling like tigers in the night
To burn away those things we love.

You think
That I haven't seen how time changes things,
As it strolls into and out of our lives,
Like those beloved characters,
As it must.