

**2015 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Honorable Mention: Hannah Cheriyan**

Respira

Breathe in, breathe out

I have done it again
Stubbornly struck out on my own, and
 sunk
 a little
 too
 deep
Swallowed more seawater than I could chew and
You,
of course, had arms outstretched to hold me afloat
As always

I haven't quite coughed up the regret yet--
 my windbag ego, it seems, is not as elastic as usual

Breathe in, breathe out

You write long love letters
Beseechingly calling me, calling them, and
 I
 read
 every
 word
Sang some, trying to inhale them anew and
You,
I find, are farther from me than ever
(I have receded)

My asthmatic hesitations cloud reality--
 must I drown, or can I swim?

(Am I weak enough to collapse, or strong enough to lean?)

Breathe in, breathe out

(We) You and I try to reach each other's minds

Silently trailing tendrils of dreams and words and
just
missing
(comprehension)

contact
(I am notoriously bad at following through) and
You,
it seems, understand only too well
As always

I shall persevere, for my prize is You--
the reflex that gives me life sounds like Your Name.

Breathe in, breathe out

Impact

When my words fail
to grapple your ramparts and facilitate a
connection
I must turn to the rest of my arsenal

And music, you know, is so effective
(That which most easily vanquishes me
is what I will most often use--
 you cannot wound me
 with my own weapon)

(I cannot always wound you with my weapons, either)

Come, let our voices dance
A sensuous minuet around the sparkling night sky
I shall lead, and you
will follow as you can

I am afraid of how little I need you
(By your jests and your jabs and our friendly fire
I fear even more that you need me less--
 how much can one pretend
 before beginning to believe?)

(The stain of my coloratura on your mind should not easily wash off)

Shall we remember these steps
when time and skill and
d i s t a n c e
tear us apart?

The strength of my bow will reach you easily
(Yet disuse and doubt and cobwebs
may weaken it beyond repair--
 I will not waste arrows
 when you do not respond)

Do not dare to tell me that I will be forgotten.

Do not dare to tell me that my harmony does not bleed into your soul.

A traveler in lavender

These dreams are drenched in lavender
Yet through the mist, a traveler
Doth wander to and fro among the wrinkles of space-time
Through far lands of Salamander
And lurid floral calendar
The traveler still searches high and low, until a chime
Transports this wanderer into a world of dust and grime

Good welcome from the denizens
Was given, and as promised then
They offered to the traveler some worn-out cheese and wine
Strolling through the sulfurous fen
Their visitor asked "Tell me when
And where I should go for to seek the thing that I would find."
The dusty citizens observed her frothy state of mind

(Yet I dreamt they dressed in lavender)

She asked a second time, "To where
And when? I seek knowledge most rare."
The people brought her maps and charts and almanacs divine
They sat her on a tipsy chair
And crumbling, the royal heir
Said "Why have you embarked upon this jaunt through space and time?
Would you not rather stay with us to fight the dust and grime?"

Quite flippantly she shook her head,
"A student still am I," she said,
"To work before I've learned enough would surely be a crime."
Then hastily the royal led
Her down into the planet's bed
Disintegrating dizzy drops did fill her mouth with chyme
And she passed bookshelves of decaying novels writ in rhyme

(And I dreamt they smelt of lavender)

"This land," declared the royal heir,
"Was full of scholars everywhere,
Who wanted to do nothing but seek knowledge all the time.
For work they felt quite unprepared,
Yet lack of work made the land bare,
Alas! Their hesitation caused the whole planet to die.
Now, follow not their passive course, and heed our people's cry!"

The royal led the traveler
Back to the surface, and told her
“Choose wisely now!” Then looked at the dust planet with a sigh
Gazing upon the villagers
She slowly said, “From what I’ve heard,
Although my learning’s incomplete, to help you I must try!”
She stayed with them and toiled with them and saved their world thereby

(And I dreamt they planted lavender)

These dreams are drenched in lavender
And our triumphant traveler
Has helped to rid this planet of its layered dust and grime
While far lands of Salamander
And lurid floral calendar
Sail through her dreams, the traveler, although she hears the chime
Delays her wandering among the wrinkles of space-time