

2015 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Fifth Place: Mackenzie Johnson

This is War

The smell contaminates the air
The instant the creature's presence is divulged,
Reeking of a slick redness,
Full of metal and pugnacity.

The abundance of legs skitters across the wall,
A little brown body bursting of bubbling evil, for sure.
Miles could separate us, but I'd know that snarl anywhere,
Those pinpricks glistening like white daggers.

War drums pump blood through my veins.
It's time to defend, they say,
Time to destroy those silk bases,
And put an end to this scurrying invasion.

In a flash, I've donned my glorious armor;
A pair of bulky leather shoes as my greaves,
Gaudy rubber gloves, my gauntlets,
A flimsy Kleenex, my impervious shield.

Suited up, I march towards the dastardly beast,
My shadow looming ahead to scout the way.
The monster stills and I feel the battle sway,
Just as it retreats hastily towards an open vent.

Alas, its desperate flight is all in vain.
With one swipe of my tissue shield, the demon is wounded,
A quick strike from my improvised club
And the devious monster's end is swiftly spelled out.

I catch my breath with loud, extended gulps
And lean closer to my fallen adversary.
Something peculiar catches my eye,
A single limb, twitching weakly my way.

I don't move.
I don't dare.

It's only then that I hear,
An odd little noise,
Just above the sound of snow falling,

No louder than the quietude of mouse's strut.

There it is again, crawling through the air.

A single white word hissing out

Why...

Inventor

I shouldn't have to put up with this.
I'm an engineer not a poet.
All these froo-froo words
With their highbrow syntax
And swirly swooping syllables,
Just makes my head ache
With the pointlessness of it all.

My inner competitor strives to impress,
But the only future I foresee
Is myself and a room full of stares,
As blank as the poem I will present.

Now I'm suffocating
Under the weight of so much pressure,
Like something really heavy,
An overweight pachyderm perhaps?

And even this theoretical beast
Could best me in what I consider a jest,
Probably come up with a better simile, if pressed.

This is when my mind goes into autopilot,
And I do what I do best.

Schematics galore and blue-print frenzies,
It looks like I'm amidst hurricane debris.
But, at last, I've had an idea.
I decided if I can't write this ridiculous poem,
I'll make something that can.

First, I've got my rhymalator-rockinator
That will knock the socks off the fox in the box,
And render that old Dr. Suez a has-been.

Next I'll get my wording sling-flinger
To redefine the word "rose" and use it in a sonnet.
Others may say it will smell as sweet,
But I know the succulent scent will be ten times better.

Though I won't stop there, oh no,
I'll make diction-dinklehins,
Metaphor-mamboozles, beating-bandiddles,
And the crowning jewel, my precious

Personified-periwaliwaiters.

I can't believe I ever thought
A poem could be so difficult to write,
I may not be a poet
But boy, am I an engineer.

Umbrella

Do you see her?
The little girl
Over there?
Just beyond the desks
In the niche she's carved out?
She's there every day.

Every minute.

Every second.

A too big scarlet coat adorns her body,
Bleeding off in long heavy folds.
Her smile has long since cracked
Into the wilted edges of a frown.

Do you see her now?

Sitting in the corner?

See the way she sinks into her chair,
And drowns in her oversized coat?
See the way she fades shade by shade
With every passing moment?

It doesn't matter.

You don't see her.

Nobody sees her.

You only see a little black umbrella
Balanced precariously above her head.
Face shrouded under layers of thick shadows.
Features smudged as the darkness pecks at her.

But she just waits patiently for the storm,
A puny umbrella and too big coat
Her only defense
Against the impending clouds.

You can't see her,
But in the moment the words flutter forth.
It's going to rain, she whispers.

It's going to rain.

Dreams Fly

I wonder what it'd be like to fly.

Bathing in the air of the Eagle's lullaby,
Floating on clouds of childhood memories,
Tracing wheels in the sky of dreams beyond vision,
Connecting the dots across a fragile night atmosphere.

Nothing would touch me if I could fly.

My wings, I'd make from
The threads of all lost things,
And stitch them to my back
With the course strings of conscious thought.

Only for one day would I be able to fly.

Riding cloud highways into space,
Zipping along the slipstreams of Draco's flight,
Gorging on the starry drinks of Midnight's sky,
Wiggling my toes in the Milky-Way's shore.

Oh, how lovely it would be to fly.

And as the day came to a close,
I'd shut my eyes to count the distance between the stars.
And inside I'd smile because I'd know
There's more than one way to learn how to fly.

Worse Problems

“There’s always a Worse Problem,”
He says with a leaning look,
Voice a taut tether,
Arm a soothing straitjacket.

“Always Worse.”

I echo distantly.
And he smiles,
Tone all patting appreciation
And delicate counsel.

But it’s a cage.
Just a cage.
The doubts still claw
The worries still thrash.

“Always Worse?”

The subdued creature howls lividly
In crescendos of quivering question marks,
Thrust into airs that will not receive them.
That *refuse* to receive them.

“Always Worse!”

But it’s a temporary fix.
The milk is still spilt,
The leaves still fall,
The cut still bleeds.

“Worse Problems.”

He whispers stifflingly,
Herding the worries
Further and further
Back into their cage.

There they wait, huddled,
For a time when *someone*
Will listen to the
Lesser Problems.