

2016 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
First Place: Antonina Malyarenko

In A Manner of Speaking...

I was a subtle blur in your horizons, that's all.
All of them, not just one, the drippy-faucet ones and
Defined, ongoing ones, I felt them all but left you anyway,
Soft and shaking for a big, paralyzing moment because what if this was *it*
And you had broken it
With existence?

But *it* won't swallow gulps of air and spit up stained-glass lungs like poison,
Won't swallow the glass, then, hoping
It will mend itself and fill up for her from the in-side instead;
It won't feel like the veranda you built for her
Is burning, because the garden you planted beneath it
Has just burst into flame-flowers itself,
And the hose you had preemptively placed nearby in a fruitless effort
To foresee the fiasco was never really a hose at all.

Please pause.

You see, it's not you, it's me,
You see, I don't remember
The candle-lit puddles of sheets, sheets, sheets, at least unless I read
Anne Sexton, whom you despise.
Then I do, but still I can't kiss the tips
Of your fingers, your finger-tips to draw scintillating statics
Anymore.

I don't remember lying down in the grass with you, being
Not two trees, but one, or touching your face and feeling the fullness
Of the world, propagating relentlessly through our roots.
That was Rumi.
I won't let myself remember, but I think you are strong.

Once, you swung from an eleven-thousand foot bow-tie
Latched to Arizona sandstone, sweat from your forehead clamoring
To reach your chin, palms and forearms covered
In scarlet, parabolic burns, with the Colorado River seducing you-
And you resisted its cooling, amorous call
A mere half-thousand feet below.

When you let your parachute straps give over to oblivion,
And the horizons you originally thought were static
Fade into waterfall mists,
When you stop thinking about starts and stops,

When change becomes so continuous you can't see your own outline
Against the wondrous panorama of the universe
You will forgive me for forgetting.
And I promise she will never, ever let you go.

Fragments

“Let us fall into the depths of the papers, into the anger of enchained words.”

There were times when
I could read Pablo Neruda in my sweater for chilly sunsets
(My soft, polyblend world)
Without feeling things. I always started over since
It might be the weather wreaking havoc on my brain
Sending it into blank disarray
Or maybe the kettle spewing water, bathing the stove
In its own reflection,
Ready to fuel my third cup of tea,
Dousing the right reactions in a prophetic whirl of leaves.
Some of me could bet I hadn't reached
The good parts yet, the parts to blow me to the island he invented,
Show me the night like broken water or
The silent bells,
The bottomless paper,
The bloody roses,
The broken candle holder,
The twisted hearts mixed up with innocence, a sick martini,
The imagery that works and doesn't
All at once. But no. For me, those days were juxtaposed-
I found no breath in continuity.
A dead dove, ashes, wedding dress, or laughter staining sheets with blood-
Ongoing allegories soon paint pictures
Of restless lives they drive daily to madness. The broken water
Is not abstract, it's yesterday, tomorrow, now. The candle holder- pregnant
With wraithlike flames that only just burned out.
I thought
When life became a dream, that it would feel
Poetic. But as I aged with privilege, ascetic disciplines set in;
Tears came with wine's warm welcome, a bitter end for childlike purity,
Sweet tastes brought in by blotched goodbyes and permanent stains
On whitewashed tablecloths.
I had to learn to breathe, to break progression
Take time alone and rip my crib from its cocooned obsession
With poetry I couldn't understand. So I began
To read in fragments, break recursive fractals, draw pieces in
With figurative magnets, like blocking out the heaviness

Of someone else's heart.
You can't even imagine what spaces do to sentences
That used to slice your soul in two.

My Fix

But the greatest of joys was rampant
In your arms, and though
Sometimes
Your shallow compliments could scatter
With the slightest breeze
It is since you that I
Am not the same.

I am different. I know
Because mac and cheese
Never smelled this good
And sugar, too
Tastes sweeter than my mother's perfume
(Something Dior) smells.
(The scent you carried with you
Was a clean mix of Vaseline and spirits).

I like to visit restaurants alone
(You were a fan of solitude
In moderation).
Piquant, melting omelets precede
Fruit plates, topped
With honeydew, naturally I still
Order enough food for two.
My brunch laughter peals through streets
Chimes down boardwalks, my mirth
Fills wide alleyways
Each morning.

I satisfy my news-fix, now, with
Cut-up magazines,
In word-search form.
(You taught me the permanence
Of information).
I choose what happens in my world,
Frame the antiques and date accordingly.
Old news is my favorite-
I have records of kittens forever
Stuck inside clocks, of submarines built primarily
To house freshwater sturgeon.
June 7th - The wreckage of the Berlin Wall
Has been rescheduled to a later date.

With your permission I kept

The memory
Of your breathless observation,
“You look incredible,”
Of your reaction
To my fears, my tears,
“Took you long enough,”
Of your receptiveness
To my success, my failure,
Of your last real words to me,
“I hope that we can meet again someday.”

I do not romanticize
But
I can control time.
Instead of running miles and miles
(Exercise kept you grounded)
To divide distance between moments
I pack seconds into suitcases
And use the treadmill as a conveyor belt
To trade them in for days.
Because each second of mind-time still gets me
An entire day with you.

I feel you
In your giant, elaborate blue shirt
Tucked into elementary sweatpants
Holding me, licking my face while
Devouring ribs drenched in barbecue sauce
And your sarcastic, sparkling eyes-
I need to close my own
To visit yours.

Nostradamus

He liked his coffee black with a splash of whiskey
He liked to watch liquids separate slowly,
He liked decanting the precipitated beans.

She liked hers marble-milky, like the resolve to be with him
Watered down and made a little wilder with cinnamon
She liked to be reassured of inconsistency in things.

He was always fishing for what he couldn't have
In murky mixologies he concocted for himself
His condition was as ancient and fruitless
As the prophecies of Nostradamus, his prospects just as clear.

She loved him sometimes.
When she did, it was for his dedication
For the very earnestness that separated them, it was an indebted kind of love
A guilt-ridden ballast whose spoils she collected eagerly
Until she felt she'd adequately spent herself.

Icing

Your lashes are coated today with icing, sprinkled

as though furtively, but I,

I've known you all your life and I

can sense deliberation.

Let me brush it off, for you, a bit

to do illusion justice, kiss

the rivers flowing calmly

down your swollen cheeks, interrupted

now and then, but not enough.