

2017 Roger M. Jones Poetry Contest
Fourth Place: Joshua Cukier

Understanding, or the Lack Thereof

A thin stream of light leaks from the crack
beneath my mother's bedroom door,
trickling under mine,
holding me awake.

I pace the sand-colored carpet,
weaving my toes through each delicate fiber,
listening for a break in the vacuum of silence.
Then it comes—a hushed cry,
rising into a muffled sob that flows in with the light,
pervading my room with her dejected plea.

I press one weak shoulder against my door,
easing it open, careful not to make a sound.
Creeping across the unlit hallway,
I tenderly twist the brass knob.
She sits there with bloodshot eyes
and nervous hands,
trembling in the faint glow
of a lone incandescent bulb.

I sit down beside her,
on those blue cotton sheets
she's had since I was born,
gently resting my arms
around her quivering shoulders,
pulling her head
toward my adolescent chest
as she murmurs about grievances
far too mature
for me to understand.

To Drown in Your Own Bed

Turn on the dark.
Ease across shifty floors.
Lie down in plush waves
of blue and white checkered flannel.

Let them envelop you,
making your bare chest and arms warm.
Then, once comfort has soothed you
into drowsy compliance,
deplete your mind
of frivolous thoughts:
 his calloused hands hitting your brittle back;
 your mother lying motionless,
 with cheap liquor
 drying on her clothes;
 your brother,
 eyes stained red from stolen bongos
 and burnt pot brownies.

Let your brain become numb.
Simply sink into the solacing waves.

But your mind will NOT STAY QUIET!
Something is pushing you--
begging you--
to open your eyes,
swim back up to the surface,
take a long, deep breath,
and lie there for hours,
floating among those thoughts
that tie you to this dreadful consciousness.
But you resist,
close your eyes,
and try again.

Sink into the waves;
let them wash over
your sick and tormented intellect.
Let them take you
somewhere better--
where your life can be
as you dream.
Don't fight back.
Just fall

asleep.

Power in Numbers

There are just too many;
it can't be done.

We have to innovate
to none.

Our Earth has taken quite enough
of our asinine politics,
global economics,
and all of that silly, "let's-kill-the-Earth" stuff.

We **need** a change,
a miracle,
something **to save** our big, blue spherical
home--
our beloved biome that we've ravaged
with too much CO₂,
and far too many me's and you's.

I know the Greenpeace, hippie war cry
may grow old as years go by,
but it's a constant struggle to save
this place--
our home
that we've left thoroughly depraved.

Because, even though we know
we've all
fucked up,
it's still too much to drink
from anything other
than a plastic cup.

Earth can't hold 4 billion more
that live the way we live;
because sustainability, as it is,
is becoming
a far
too far-
fetched wish.