

THE  
MESSENGER

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PERFORMANCE POETRY  
FOR THE MERCURY CAFE  
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# THE PAGE

*to inspiration*

and you would still appear, appear in  
the paper I held in my hand,

rippling waves in the pages before me,  
a dorsal fin of a shark circling my head,

watching its prey. I could touch  
the page and still feel

the rose I threw over the mahogany  
box in the November cold,

the grass covered with ice, cracking  
every time I took a step toward you.

I could feel the pain in the paper, and  
I could still feel the cold

marble, freezing my fingers. And the  
etched message  
on the stone could still

took hold of me the way you did.  
All I had to do was look at your

writing and feel the blood rush, feel  
your breath on my neck, feel

the fist jumping out from the page  
and hitting  
me in the face. I could feel it.

I could feel a thousand wars fought  
and won on your page, in

your words. I could feel your hot

breath pushing up against

my neck, I could feel your hands taking  
my shoulders,  
throwing me back in the chair.

I would look at your paper  
and see out the  
window the masses rising, rioting in the

streets. I can feel the tide rising from  
your thoughts.  
What do you possess? What

have you been through, to give you  
such a gift? I  
look back at the page,

and I begin to feel your hand from  
under the page, from in the desk,

razor in hand, shoving up  
through the fiber,  
slicing at the air,  
trying desperately to get to me.

And I get up from my chair, walk over  
to the bathroom,  
almost like memorization.

I feel nothing but the drive you felt.  
In the mirror,  
there are cuts on my face.

# BURNING BUILDING

This is what you don't allow me to say.  
These words I utter are a plea for help  
and you tell me you want to be the hand  
that pulls me from the burning building  
and every time I try to be rescued  
you turn your back and walk away

so I will rescue myself this time again  
and I will wonder if I should stop trying  
and allow myself to perish in the flames  
now all I have to do is sit and wait  
for another disaster to consume me  
and sitting in silence is exactly what I'll do

Why do you tell me one thing and do another?  
Why do you run away when I need you most?  
I'm stepping over the wooden beams now,  
and the flames are all around me. Here, look  
at the blood dripping from my arms. Here,  
smell my flesh burning. This is what you do.

I do not walk away unscathed. I never do.  
But now that I wait for my next burning building  
I know I will never allow myself to enter it.  
Why can't it be easier to perish? I try and try,  
and every time at the last minute, my figure  
steps over the the charred remains and saves me.

If only there were no more burning buildings.  
If only I didn't have to save myself all the time.  
If only I could feel free, just this once.  
If only I could feel safe with you, just this once.  
If only your words weren't empty promises.  
If only your words were not the burning building.

## CONFIDENT WOMEN

I met up with an old friend of mine  
for drinks last week. I knew her  
in high school, although we weren't  
close friends then. In those days she  
needed therapy, had problems with drugs,  
I think, or else it was just family  
problems. I was a bit insecure myself,  
shy, meek, scared of life. Since those days  
we matured, we're now more independent,  
self-confident, self-assured women.  
It was good to see her again. She  
just came back from camping in  
Australia; although physically I had  
gone nowhere, we both had our stories  
to tell over a bottle or two of wine.  
And we gossiped, she told me of the  
handsome Australian man she fell for,  
I told her of the roller-coaster I call  
my romantic life. And we laughed.

And then the gossip changed, her voice lowered, and sounding stern but quiet, she told me of how a man broke into her apartment one night last summer and he tried to rape her, and after kicking and screaming in her underwear she managed to break free and her attacker escaped. She told me they found the man, and the trial is scheduled for later in the month. And she sat there, with her wine glass in her hand, looking so confident, as if she knew she won this battle. Trying not to sound corny, I told her I could give her a hug. And she leaned on my shoulder, and she cried, hiccuping as she tried to catch her breath. They would make her recount everything on the stand, she said, and the defense lawyers would try to make her sound promiscuous because she slept alone in her underwear. I told her I would go with her to the trial. I told her she is winning by speaking out. Self-assured women. Confident women. How confident are we supposed to be?

# THE MARTYR AND THE SAINT

they gave their daughter the name  
of the Patron Saint of television

and the television's always been  
one thing she hated about him

or was it the drinking that he needed  
more than her

the business has gone bad  
I'm a failure I'm not a man

he said he respected her  
then he'd call her

a twenty dollar whore from Vegas

and the mother would hold  
the child, the saint, the pure angel

hold her ears and hope she  
couldn't hear

## HOLDING MY HAND

when we're walking in stride together down  
the street and our feet pump out the same rhythm  
and our shoulders are almost touching and our  
hands brush up against each other for one brief  
moment and he reaches over and takes my hand

when he slides his fingers around mine  
and I feel him move along the palm of my hand  
well, no one knows what it feels like  
when his fingers curl and hold me tight  
well, it feels like pop rocks

it feels like when that candy is sliding  
down my throat after I let it explode  
on my tongue and it's still tingling and no  
one knows I'm eating this and no one knows  
the feeling and this is my little secret

and I feel this feeling like never before  
and it makes me want to laugh and cry  
because I look around the room and no one  
else is eating those pop rocks and no one  
knows the feeling when he's holding my hand



## MIXING METAPHORS

a heart is supposed to mean romance  
but the deep dark red suggests lust

the cupid suggests true love anew  
but a child knows only dependency

love hits you like a ton of bricks  
and you only hurt the ones you love

I keep hearing of all these conflicts  
and I'm trying to make sense of it all

and I'm mixing my metaphors now  
I'm mixing my cocktails on a saturday night

throw love in with vodka and lime  
and a little cointreau and you have

an absolutely perfect martini, well  
that's what I hear so I keep drinking

and mixing and drinking and trying  
you know, I've heard that for an added kick,

keep in the love but add just a splash of lust  
the way that deep red heart of romance

suggests so much more than candy and flowers  
because really, when it comes down

to it, when you get all those metaphors  
together even though they seem to mean

so many different things, well,  
when you get the right martini recipe,

well, every ingredient is so necessary  
lust and love and all that other good-

tasting stuff that goes down so easy  
well, every ingredient is necessary

in that perfect drink because everything  
seems to come together so well

and everything suddenly means  
so much even if it's only a drink and

even if it's only a cheesey metaphor  
and suddenly that's okay

# HAVE NO BACKBONE

I tried to put on the show for you  
but no matter how good an actress is  
she cannot become her part  
I tried to show I loved you  
I tried to act as if I cared  
but I really didn't give a damn  
not about you  
and so I hid it  
I hid my feelings  
suppressed my emotions  
and I acted like your daughter

I feel nothing  
so I go through the motions  
and it hurts me to think  
that I really don't have a family

the flashbacks kill me  
and so I do my best to forget  
and to smile when I am told  
but I can only smile for so long  
when I really want to cry  
and I really want to leave

but the thought of the curtain closing  
hurts me more  
than playing the part  
so don't worry  
the role is still filled  
for as long as I do not have a backbone  
and as long as I do not have a family  
I will act

# EXPECTING THE STONING

|

you know how you want a popsicle  
and you want it for the longest time  
and you don't even know what it's going to taste like when you get it  
and then you finally get it  
and it tastes oh so good  
and you have some if it  
and you want to save it so you can have it later  
and then you realize  
that in order to keep the popsicle from disappearing  
it has to stay in the freezer

that it had to stay in the freezer in order to survive  
that it was meant to be cold forever  
or consumed

it was either one or the other  
they taught you that fact when you were little  
you can't have it both ways

you can try  
and it might be fun at first  
but everyone knows it will hurt later on

||

I think what I liked the most about us  
was the theory of romance

no, wait, it wasn't that  
it was the fact that it was forbidden  
and this wasn't quote unquote supposed to be happening

but I liked the idea of being with you  
I would travel across the country to see you  
the thought of you and the times we had behind everyone's backs  
those times were like poems to me  
and maybe looking back we weren't technically together  
when we couldn't even tell anyone  
but it was still nice for me to fantasize

and what did it get me



maybe my problem was that it was all in my head  
and maybe I didn't realize  
the novelty would wear off for you  
that you were like the average American  
and after twenty seconds of watching a television show  
you'd want to change the channel  
with the remote on the arm of your chair

I didn't know you were a popsicle that would melt  
when you were exposed to ANY sunlight or ANY heat at ANY time

I didn't know you had problems. don't we all.  
we all don't go to psychiatrists and stay on medications  
maybe I didn't know how bad your problems were

I didn't know you were a snowman  
that I made in the backyard at my house in the winter when I was little  
a snowman that was fully equipped with  
a carrot nose, like pinocchio, no, wait, like you, with  
no hair, like you, with black rocks for eyes, like you

and yeah, that snowman melted with spring, like you  
and maybe I should have learned my lesson  
from that damned snowman

## IV

I remember how little kids would want to build snowmen  
in the winter  
they didn't seem to mind the snowman eventually going away

I hated the cold, so I didn't play in the snow as much  
maybe in playing those little games  
everyone else learned their lesson

## V

I should expect the stonings that I am bound to receive  
for telling you that I know what you have done  
and that I want the rest of the world to know it too  
I will expect the stonings  
with time, I have been getting used to the punishments  
for telling the truth, even when people don't want to hear it

so, thank you for getting my hopes up and then blowing them away  
with one breath from your lips  
like anyone would do to table salt spilled on the counter

because I think I needed to learn that lesson  
and in a way, for now,  
I only have you to thank for it

# GIFT OF MOTHERHOOD PART TWO

*“We need only think of how the gift of motherhood  
is often penalized rather than rewarded  
even though humanity owes its very survival to this gift  
Certainly, much remains to be done  
to prevent discrimination against those  
who have chosen to be wives and mothers”*

*Letter to Women, Message of His Holiness  
POPE JOHN PAUL II, July 10*

“so i was sitting in on a meeting with the other managers, and we were talking about presenting our project at the upcoming trade show, when our boss said, oh, none of us will have to go i’ll just hire some dumb - and then he looked at me, with my long blonde hair - some model to demonstrate it instead. and this is the same guy who has a photo in his office of a woman in a legligee grabbing her crotch, i mean, it’s not even a tasteful photo. i wonder what he’d think if he came into my office and there was a playgirl magazine sitting on my desk? one of my supervisors even kept asking me to go out and get lunches for everyone, or to fax stuff for him. i finally had to tell him no. i said, why don’t you ask john? he’s been here less than me, you could ask him to do it. but he never did. i look around, and i think, i’m the only woman here. why is that?”

# TIMING IS EVERYTHING

timing is everything, you know  
just when you say you've had enough  
just when you're ready to wave that white flag  
and step out of the ring and stop playing the game  
and stop feeling the pain because you're numb

that's when for a brief moment something  
wonderful happens and reminds you why you live  
and reminds you of what hope and joy and  
even love is

and suddenly breathing is no longer a chore  
and suddenly nothing is a chore and suddenly  
there is no pain and suddenly you remember  
what it's like to be alive and you start to like it

well, that's when they pull they rug out from  
under you, right at that moment, so that  
you can fall to the floor and then the biting  
sting of pain hurts that much more

timing is everything, you know, they do it  
that way on purpose because they can't let you  
go on feeling hope and not feeling pain  
this is their key, it's all in the timing



## A STAND-OFF

Too many things bombard us  
we scan from channel to channel  
eyes darting, first war, destruction,  
then a weight loss commercial.  
I know you're thinking society is  
ludicrous - and it is - but don't you see  
that when I watch that t.v. screen  
all I see is that I'm not thin enough?  
I've tried to make things right with  
us. I've tried to bring us one glimmer  
of happiness, I've tried to turn off  
that media mudslinging  
tried to make things a little better  
even if it is only in our bedroom  
and even if it is only for one night.  
And you, you look away  
and think I'm hopeless. I'm grasping  
at whatever straws are left.

# CIVIL WAR

I

the confederates are winning the battle  
but I know the north will win the war  
and all they'll get is a ravaged battlefield

II

a civil war is raging inside me  
but I'm tired of fighting from within  
when all I want is a revolution

## LET THE WAR BEGIN

My silence is my only choice. My silence  
is my weapon. As it is with you. As it is  
with all of us.

To go against all instinct and not fight.  
This is my weapon. To keep us alive and  
bury the truth.

This is the way I keep our sanity, but  
lose mine. Isn't this the way it always goes.  
Me giving in first.

You say this isn't what you want but  
your actions speak novels to me. I've read  
this book before.

Nothing is pure when you destroy purity.  
Nothing is sacred when there is no God  
and no hope.

I've lost my battles and now I need new  
defenses. I've thrown down the gauntlet.  
Let the war begin.

## CAST IN STONE

I've searched a millenia for you  
and my love for you  
    will survive through the ages  
And if they cast us in stone  
it will only cement my love for you  
for all to see and admire  
because even if the elements  
    chip away our outer façades  
the marble will smooth in time  
and my soul will still flourish  
being frozen by your side.

# THE MESSENGER

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