Faces

Ron Sanders

for all its brevity, perhaps the deepest work ever written.

Praise for Faces:

This is one of the most amazing pieces I've ever read. To me it screams the pain, the isolation, the mystery. I think this is genius. Brilliant piece!!!!
–G.K. Bostic

A captivating piece . . . wonderful turns of phrase and an emotion and style that pulls the reader in . . . a flash of insight every few lines . . . the tangible honey-musk of truth . . . an intoxicating poem that speaks to the emotions, which swell at these discoveries.
A most powerful write.
I am not easy with high ratings. I will not review a poem if I can't rate it at 90 or above. Generally, if I rate at 95 or above, you've definitely earned my respect. Here, however, is a clean 98 rating. I've never given higher. 100 is impossible because no poem can ever be perfect. And if I ever find a 99 poem, I'm sure I will go blind immediately after reading it. This poem has me squinting and tearing from its brightness.
Wonderful poem. Simply inspiring.
–R. Puetter

An amazing read. I loved this.
–S. Raine

A beautiful poem. Just fabulous.
–anon

A spectacular poem . . . beautiful and very descriptive.
–anon

ronsandersartofprose@yahoo.com

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by Ron Sanders

Faces

Black is the seed, and black, the fruit.

The blossom of light an affront: wrought of nothing, resolving nothing, returning to nothing–the blossom is Everything.

And a man contends, endures,
knowing, in his moment, that all that matters
matters not; that in the crowd
he is alone, that in the cosmos
he is lost, that in his writing
he is written. He is a coal, shot hot between voids.

Intense to evanescent, each pass of a life
has a spectrum.

Red is the womb.

Here, at riot's eye, all bellows howl,
all fires bend to the harlot wind of becoming.
And the nub is a lump, and the lump *accrues*,
marbles dreamless, in liquor weightless, defining:
Liquid ruby, clinging vine, tallow flower in wine–
the little ogre, caught on a briar, kicks.
Comes a marvelous trophy, born squirming and gory,
torn naked and pendent, borne blind and grotesque–
wound about the hollows and seams,
spat in a maelstrom:
one more shape in the window,
one more shadow exposed
in the bloody triumph of light.

Out of the whirl, the faces gather round.
The boy has opened his eyes,
but the infant makes no sound.
Shapes loom to the sides, to the front and rear:

The faces grin, closing in . . . grow enormous fingers
to point, to pinch–to peel back the veil
and make his eyes scream.
        In the dimness a glimmer, a nimbus, a pearl.
The colors peak.
Within their arms a becking form appears.
The figure is a woman, whose seeming lips recite:
        "Come sunder the night. Little ember, ignite.
        I am mother, I am mother. I am life, I am light."
But like oil on a rainy day,
the colors blend and wend their way
into the whirl, and there,
subdued, the voice is slurred,
the light, obscured,
and night
renewed.

Here on the lattice,
morning embroiders the tatters of night.
While tall beaded glasses
squeeze melody from melting ice
the diced and slanting shafts of sun
checker the shadows with tangerine light.

On the sidewalks April's children run
but the eyes in the faces see
nephew on the august perch
of uncle's wicker knee.
Graven in air, the faces shift,
their eyes a flickering stream.
Loosed features drift, expressions run
in subtle strokes of shade and sun.
The stream sucks him in: swirls of abhorrence,
pools of disdain. Succumbing, drawn under,
he swallows his eyes. But the eyes in the faces remain
watching.

So scrawny it grieves, he eats too damned much.
ever absent, he is always in the way.
Sickly, quiet, submissive, shy,
he hides when the faces quarrel,
cries when they crack his lie.
Craving love, he learns early to fast.
contriving a limp, he is weaned at last.
What hold wanders here–there are no bridges,
only walls. Every scribe is a master of cant.
The learned are jaundiced, the ignorant smug.

And those who would name his demons,
when maintaining “this will pass,”
fashion their webs of pap and straw.
This animal man is a thief.

Mother,

My world is a stranger. My eyes are wounds
on a mind that will not heal.
I saw more range, more warmth, more *mother*,
in the dance of sun on heather,
in a single kiss of dew.
Now your urn, blessed bowel, fouls the cedar
of father’s mantel, while he grows blacker,
blending bile with grief and gin.
Those lips that never tendered,
that heart I never knew–mother,
who *were* you?

Ubiquitious, the emerald slut lies splayed, exploding:
from her pores an eruption, on her belly a rank,
stinking moss. She bleeds life, vomits it,
into bud, into blade; sharing with a passing star

the silent scream of spring.
But here she dreams, perfumed,
a picture of grace, her verdure in groom.
Secluded, seduced, sedated. Churls put on her face
while zephyrs attend to the scent of her loom.
Time purls. The zephyrs flit sweetly,
chasing motes in fibers of light.
Playing tag in the sun, currents weave into one
near a still-life of mourners and fatherless son.
The figures seem rooted, unreal.
As the gust musses trees, light leaps between leaves.
The greenery breathes. As if shaken,
the scene comes to life:
Huddling in sync, the faces incline, their eyes
like slinking thieves. The young man implodes.
The tension relents and he straightens. He wheels.
He limps off alone, wind hounding his heels,
the moment too eerie to bear. Sedans trickle by.
A raw widow grieves. But the faces continue to stare.
And the wind pirouettes, finds a wing,
has a plunge, brakes low on a rest,
makes a guarded descent. The breeze buffets markers,
losing vigor and bent, then slips thru the stones
toward the beckoning trees

toward the beckoning trees.
The draft riffles leaves, where its whisper is spent
and lost as a sigh.

A stipend, a shack, a lessor in wait.
Such are the fruits of his father's estate.
He breaks no bread, seeks no sweet;
strange dynamics govern his blood,
preclude his seed from the common fire.
Music of amity, refinement's caress,
are brute concerns; abrasive, obscene.
In his quiet aching way he is whole.
Seasons burst and smolder, surrender and brood.
Their pageant revolves about him.
The years breathe, driving the crowd,
steeping its fevers in jasmine and sun.
Humanity brawls, exalting the flame.
But without him.
And he grays, sinking, certain his pain cannot,
could not possibly, be borne by another.
The silence condenses, sets.
At last even pain deserts him.
But near the brink he hears the nervous hum

of impermanence, feels the white pang of being's wing
as day succumbs to the fist of night.
Dawn burns deeper, duller; each beam towing
a filament of dusk, each round of the wheel a salvo
in the stunning of his eyes.

Now the years are mired in sameness.
The day wears on. Guests come unbidden:
Conscience, the despot. Sentiment, the leech.
Misgivings sojourn, transmigrate, return,
as Lonesomeness plumbs his moribund vein,
metastasizing.
Still he rooms with the wind, dies waking,
dreams sleepless. And it dogs him:
all this teeming while an instant, an irrelevancy
a rube's view of the pulse careening downstream,
working its rhyme into a billion like irrelevancies.
Here *must* be real, Now *must* be sound, and yet–
no sooner are the moments cast
than shape is shadow, and present, past.
Only the day wears on.
Blue is the evening begotten, the twilight of our lives.
Dark gathers,

mooring its stain where a dreamer weighs the deep,
his eyes in ruin, his color in vain.
Only ballast and mind, merely ego and rind,
growing blind as the day wears on.

Down this grim promenade
a musty wind hustles gaunt silhouettes.
They are loth to be borne;
they are patiently measuring stones.
Eyes leap in their caverns, looks light and remain
on a smudge in the gloaming, a scarecrow with cane,
tapping out his tenure in a cold feeble rain.
And now the purple veins of near-night
thud sluggishly, almost grudgingly.
The black earth splits wetly, obscenely.
There: *something impatient stirs, exposed.*
Limbless, sightless, the lamprey rises;
her breath unbearable, her length immeasurable,
her age–
impossible!
Preening whore, hypnotic.
In one vile kiss she is sieve and abyss.
Her bruised lips are splayed, her violet mouth, made,

and her churning, insatiable craw is
pitch.

Out of the whirl, the faces gather round.
was he hurt?
can you hear *me?*
But the old man makes no sound.
Shapes loom to the sides, to the front and rear:
The faces glare, stealing air . . . grow enormous fingers
to prod, to pin–to pull down the veil
and make his eyes seize.
In the dimness a glimmer, a nimbus, a pearl.
The colors peak.
Within their arms a becking form appears.
The figure is a woman, whose seeming lips recite:
"Come sunder the night. Waning fire, grow bright.
I am mother, I am mother. I am life, I am light."
But like spectra from a dying sun,
the colors flare, are torn, are spun
into the whirl, and there,
subdued, the voice is hushed,
the blossom, crushed,
and night
renewed.

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by Ron Sanders
http://ronsandersatwork.com
ronsandersartofprose@yahoo.com