The Pen My Hand Elizabeth Ragona

The Pen in My Hand

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THE MUSE

Ah, Muse, You've returned. Sit. Warm your feet by the fire. Let me hang up your dusty cloak. You look road-weary. Tell me where you've been, The treasures you've seen. You left this house several summers ago; You left it dark and empty; You took my favorite pen And forgot to say goodbye. My heart, boxed and shelved, Was left to wait for your return, And now, on a whim, You halt your worldwind tour And stop for a cup of tea. How long can you stay? Will you marry or, Like a mistress, Take what you can, quick as a squall, And leave. Ah, Muse, my sweet. Stay as long as you'd like. I'll go make the tea.

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(1993)

THIS GYPSY ROAD

The air is a fog around this gypsy road.

It pushes on my chest and I have to take small, weak breaths.

The colors around me are grays and blacks;

And I long for blues and greens and the bright yellow sun.

I have walked this gypsy path for so long,
Pushing through the branches and leaves,
My calves ache, my knees shake and tremble,
Even my shoulders and hands are scratched and bloody.

A lifetime on this gypsy trail, the music is always behind me.

The smell of burning oak follows me,

red embers show me the way back.

Bells, cymbals, tambourines are far back in the distance.

But I don't dance anymore; and I push onward.

I walk quietly, one foot in front of another. I am a gypsy dancer. I'm afraid to laugh and scare off the birds
That look down at me from the lowest, barest branches,
As I step over rocks and the fallen limbs of ancient trees.

Memories are fading, the music is distant. I'm too weary to go on through the fog. I'll just stop here and sit for a moment, Resting against this tree.

I've forgotten how long it's been since I've danced.

In sitting, finding peace in this quiet time,

I didn't know it but I've invited a small gray bird.

She chirps, tilts her head, and jumps just a little closer.

I hold out my hand, flat, and wait.

She pecks at a leaf, a branch; she chirps, she steps a little closer.

Watching her, I forget to see the sun rise through the trees.

I ask her in my course, dry voice "will you come to me?"

But she flies away into the yellow dawn.

As I rise to follow her a pair of small copper cymbals falls from my pocket,

The leather holding them together is cracked and whithered.

I pick them up and brush off the dirt,

Slip one on my thumb and the other on my finger.

When they touch, the air is cut with a soft, cool "Ting."

I look down the path for the little gray bird;

Is that her, just up ahead?

Stepping, pushing away from the trees,

Gravel crunches under my feet,

And I walk into the dawn.

SEARCHING

I searched for you in the forest; Mist and ferns and the rustle of leaves.

Brown bark and the smell of moss.

I followed the rabbit path Deep into the woods;

Bramble and bark scratched my arms.

I called your name and an owl answered.

Why do you search for me in the forest? I'm not there.

I wandered through the city, Stone and glass and the hum of a thousand voices, Yellow taxis and warm steam rising.

> I walked along the street, Peaking in windows.

Diners and shopkeepers looked on with disdain.

I called your name and a church bell rang.

Why do you search for me in the city? I'm not there.

I walked through the world; Rubble and war and the marches of revolution! Crying babies and weeping mothers.

I followed the sun

Over continent and sea;

Bullets and Billy clubs striking out at me.

I called your name and a cannon fired.

Why do you search for me in the world? I'm not there.

I traveled for three days;
And when I reached the end of the world
I walked onto the crystal white sand
And wrote your name;
Hoping that you would look down from the sky
And see me,

Find me.

But the waves came and washed it away.

Weary and weak, I stopped to rest; And in the silence, I heard your voice. Look within, Love said. It is there that you will find me.

PASSION IS WASTED ON THE YOUNG

Passion is wasted on the young
Who know nothing of life or death
Or dinner alone at the kitchen table.
They want champagne and Peter Gabriel;
They want rain and spaghetti kisses.
They think they'll beat the odds
And survive the iceberg and the asteroid.

I fell in love too young.
I wasted my allotted hours on
Tapestry on repeat - the vinyl not the cassette.
I wrote poetry, and talked of love and pain.
I was proud and embarrassed:
I'd been caught quickly, easily,
By a laugh, a smile, a song, a strength,
a single
memorable
kiss.

I fell in love too often.
I found my soul mate
Nine times.
She was Beauty.
She was Gentleness.
She was Strength.
She was Song.
She was Passion.
She set me free and gathered me in.
She introduced me to the woman I wanted to be.
She died.
She brought me to life.

There should be some measure of passion Left for middle aged women. She is a woman, not a girl, Watching the sun set From Galway Bay. She is a woman, not a girl, Who whispers one last time, "I'll never let go." She paints, she writes, She dreams, she feels. In love, she is a storm and a rose. Alone, she continues to wait. She waits still, Telling herself, "I'm stronger for it." She is, yes. But she'd rather be a rose. Or a storm.

THE CROSSROAD

They say time is linear.

But right now I am warping back and forth

between a past

filled with equal amounts of love and tears, and an uncertain future.

Swirling around me are the faces and voices of those I have loved before and those I love now.

Their laughter is the soundtrack of my life.

Their psalms are my worship.

And Time has no hold in this place.

Perhaps this is what a crossroads looks like.

The path behind me is familiar.

The patterns, the themes, the stars

- year after year Orion reappears - guiding me through the chaos and confusion.

"Become your truest self," he urges me.

But the path ahead of me is the one I usually avoid -

because I expect it to be

filled with equal amounts of love and tears.

It is here that I usually say

"that journey will be too hard," and I turn and walk down the quiet road, the solitary road.

Am I just a shadow of who I should be?

Of who I could have been?

Do I seek out my potential in the faces of other women?

Are they mirrors of who I am or who I want to be?

There was a time when I would have answered yes.

But now, at this crossroads, in this swirling of

past and present, of joy and tears,

I see these women - once bowed and battered by the swirling winds of time - now, they stand victorious.

I see their joys, their tears, their love, their strength.

"Become your truest self," they encourage me.

And I am stronger than I believe I can be.

And I take a step.

THIS NEW DAY

Violet blue midnight,

Rich as wine,

Sweet as blueberries,

Fades into a powder blue morning

With sugar clouds.

I wake before the sun

And make my journey to holy water.

And as the sky begins to brighten

I bow in prayer, in humble joy,

Of this new day.

THE HAIR PIN

There is a moment when I first see you After having been apart for a day, a month,

O, forever!

You have appeared right beside me and

I am unprepared.

I am shy.

I am coy.

I am a child in love's first bloom.

When you look at me, you watch me blush;

You smile and your eyes twinkle.

You step in closely and hug me.

Your breath is warm on my neck.

Whose heart do I hear?

You are speaking but I can't make out the words;

I hear only the hum of your voice.

I feel the vibrations on my skin.

When you let go, I step back,

Just far enough to be out of reach.

My hands are precocious.

I want to know every curve.

Then, slowly, you reach back and

Remove the pin holding your hair.

And with the sigh of an emerging butterfly,

Your hair falls onto your shoulders.

Ah! The years fade. The girl laughs and

I am captured.

I am a disciple.

I am an enthusiast!

I am thinking to myself:

Breathe.

You must breathe.

I SAY YOUR NAME IN PRAYER

In the middle of the day

I stop –

No matter where I am,

No matter what I'm doing -

And I say your name with a breath,

With a prayer.

I was this small human in a vast universe;

A drifting, planet-less moon

Until the day I first saw you.

Your smile, your eyes – Gravity –

Pulled me across the room.

I knew the moment we were introduced

That my life would change.

And now, each day,

In breathless joy,

In wide-eyed wonder,

I say your name in prayer.

Eres la pluma en mi mano; ¿Qué más podría hacer?

Si nunca te vi otra vez, todavía escribo poemas sobre usted. Su voz es la voz de mi conciencia, tu risa es el latido de mi corazón, tus brazos son mi único contacto, tus manos, sólo mi trabajo.

Si nunca te vi otra vez, me lo pierdo como invierno echa de menos el verano. Tu fe es mi verdadero norte, tus deseos son mi jornada, su sueño es pasión de mi noche, tu aliento, mi aliento.

Si nunca te vi otra vez, todavía escribo poemas sobre usted. Eres la pluma en mi mano; ¿Qué más podría hacer?

You Are the Pen in My Hand. What More Could I Do?

If I never saw you again,
I would still write poems about you.
Your voice is the voice of my conscience,
Your laughter is the beat of my heart,
Your arms are my only touch,
Your hands, my only labor.

If I never saw you again,
I would miss you like winter misses the summer.
Your faith is my true north,
Your desires are my day's journey,
Your slumber is my night's passion,
Your breath, my breath.

If I never saw you again,
I would still write poems about you.
You are the pen in my hand;
What more could I do?

EVERY DAY

Every day,
You are the light of my heart.
You are the breath in my soul;
From the first moment to the last.

Each time I see you,
I stop thinking in words;
I start thinking in poems;
And I'm either writing about you,
Or because of you.

Every day,
I think it would be so much easier,
To just walk away and stop,
Stop caring, stop wanting, stop dreaming.

Then I see you,
And I stop believing
That I can live a life without you.
You are the light of my heart.
You are the breath in my soul;
From the first moment to the last.

CADA DIA

Cada día, eres la luz de mi corazón. Eres el aliento de mi alma; Desde el primer momento a la última.

Cada vez que te veo, dejar de pensar en las palabras; Empezar a pensar en los poemas; Y estoy bien escrito acerca de usted, o por causa de vosotros.

Todos los días, creo que sería mucho más fácil, sólo a pie y parar, dejar de cuidar, dejar de querer, deja de soñar.

Luego te veo
y dejo de creer
que puedo vivir una vida sin ti.
Eres la luz de mi corazón.
Eres el aliento de mi alma;
Desde el primer momento a la última.

IN THE GARDEN

We've skipped out of work today, she and I, And now we are walking along a stone path

Weaving in and out among the rose bushes.

She is happy today as she dances

'Round the flowers like a summer butterfly.

Laughing, smiling, she points this way to show me a yellow rose,

Then she turns the path and calls to me.

"Yes, it's the most pure white rose I've ever seen," I say.

She blesses me with her biggest smile and skips away.

These are the moments when neither one of us

Remembers the world beyond the garden walls.

The storms and the would-be demons are forgotten,

And she is happy. And I am happy just to be with her.

I am studying the pattern of the stone path

When she comes to me and touches my hand.

She wants to show me a perfect rose.

She's talking, giddy and girlish.

"Look there," she points but I cannot move.

I am too busy waiting for my hand to catch fire

From the heat of her touch.

I'm expecting to see smoke and perhaps even flames.

How is it that even her lightest, most innocent touch

Makes such heat?

"How lovely it is," she says wistfully.

But as she stands beside the rose, I see what she cannot.

She outshines this red rose.

To me it is pale and I see its burnt, brown edges.

But she is the butterfly, emerged from the cocoon,

Shining in the sunlight; dancing, laughing.

And like a little girl in a pink summer dress,

I follow along on her winding journey.

Close. Close. She comes to me and whispers in my ear.

"I have a secret."

I look at her, too breathless to speak.

She leans in and I feel her breath on my ear and my neck.

"I want to see if the irises are still in bloom."

Then she laughs and skips down the path,

Bluebells blossoming in her wake.

THE WORLD IN BLUE AND GREEN

She fits into my hand perfectly;
Cool at first, but then she warms
As my fingers enfold her.
She is the voice of every dream.
Each day, when I first hold her
My heart begins to beat more quickly,
My breath deepens; and
My eyes see the whole world
In Monet blues and greens.
How is it that I have lived for so long
And only just begun to see the world
And all its poetry?

CHASING A GYPSY MOON

I'm chasing a gypsy moon tonight Trying to get you off my mind. Gold and full, she's dancing In and out of the clouds For vagabonds, mystics and me.

We follow the Sun down an empty road While Texaco stars guide our way.
"West!" she says, pulling me
Into her whirling dance.

- I'm dizzy -
- I'm drunk -

On Waffle House coffee,

And my thoughts keep coming back to you.

I can hear her hum, "Follow me!"
As she disappears.
She's caught the Sun.
Then, as mystics say their final prayers,
I return to the Waffle House
And write limericks for the waitress.

Traveling On

The night sky glows florescent black

With remnants of the city lights behind me.

This country highway is empty except for the tall pines –

Black ghosts,

Southern sentinels,

Guarding my journey,

keeping me safe.

Another night searching for you;

Hoping that, somehow, you are out here searching for me.

There is a break in the trees

And I see the moon: a distant spotlight.

Her stage is a cotton field – full and thick and white.

The cotton is bursting;

Giggling, white babies reaching up

To play with cotton fairies

Dancing in the breeze.

How many nights have I searched for you

On empty highways and in crowded city streets?

Deep in the center of the cotton field stands an old oak tree.

She is crooked and broken and gray in the moonlight.

Oh, Matron, speak to this lonely traveler!

Her rustling branches sway slowly

As she sings her cotton babies to sleep

And in her low moan I hear her say

"Travel on, travel on."

At the edge of the field I reach down and take one stray cotton bud, Still nestled in its sharp brown shell,

And place it on the seat beside me.

And I travel on.

PACKED

I looked up from my writing when I heard you open the door.

To love you

I can see that you're packed. Can I say one thing before you go?

I won't stop you. I won't ask you to stay.
I won't beg to be loved.
I won't say that my heart is breaking.
I won't tell you that I forgot to feel lonely.
I will try to forget how it felt to laugh.
I won't imagine dancing in the rain.
I won't tell you that the poems were about you.
I won't dream of your smile and your laughter.
I won't wonder what it would have felt like
To hold you
To kiss you

I'm looking at your back, long and straight.
I watch your hand pick up the suitcase:
Brown tweed and leather edges,
It was your grandmother's, you once told me.
I wonder what you could have in it.
You never left a toothbrush or a sweater.
I hear something roll and rattle on the inside.
I look down at my desk and the half-finished poem.
Ah, you've taken something of mine.

I can see that you're packed. Can I say one thing before you go? Can you leave the pen here with me?

EMBERS OF A RED SKY

At the edge of the forest Where the red hawk makes his nest She made her choice And I watched as she walked away. A wind rustled through the brown maples, And I watched as they danced, Leafless, thin hands stretched against the grey sky. The red hawk circled high above, Shifting his wing ever-so-slightly To ride the wind, Searching, Searching, Searching. I looked down the long, brown pathway, The avenue of the deer and a rabbit family, But she was gone into the woods. Turning, I began to walk back across the clearing Toward a home that was no longer ours, The yellow grass crunching beneath my boots. The red hawk called for his lover and Her call came in echoes from across the Plain. The sun was shining through the trees When she finally arrived With a brown field mouse as a present. As they settled in for the night, I turned to go inside. The cabin smelled of coffee, And roasting pheasant, And the remnant of a fallen maple in the fireplace. I watched through a frosted window As the sun faded;

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And in the last embers of a red sky,

The snow began to fall.

THE MUSE

Don't go.

I wouldn't care if it were the Sun Or the Moon.

But if you leave
You will take with you
My voice.

If you stayed
I wouldn't know what to do.
No one has ever stayed.
I would only have my imagination
And to love you.

(2015)