Poet's Logic

A poet in an alternative universe attends a very disappointing competition

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To me, the future is a bridge I will never cross. The idea of it seems chaotic, unpredictable, chock full of way too many equations and way too many variables. Even the tiniest of decisions can result in monumental changes. But no matter how much the exterior changes, at the heart of society, there will always be similar issues to what we face today. This has been true many centuries ago, and will be true for as long as the human race exists. As much as I would like to imagine an utopian society, where artists and creatives have full rein, I realise that the hierarchy of society - the powerful few against the powerless many - will still exist. What may change is how we define 'power', or in the case of my story, 'talent'. Just because artists must be appreciated, it doesn't mean that scientists are not required. And as much as we need our engineers and mathematicians, literature and art is what makes us want to live. It doesn't have to be one or the other. But it is upto us to realise that 'the many' are not powerless. It may be a struggle for as long as we exist, but as long as we keep fighting the good fight, our decisions could compound into a future that is better for us all.

The bloody pages of history are splattered with the names of revolutions, etched into the collective consciousness by winners and heroes. From tea and taxes to freedom and democracy¹, humanity has fought for it all. But the last revolution, the great gamechanger, was the 'Revenge of the Artists'², and now, the world has become a drastically different place.

Gone are the days where we kowtowed to the cold, inhuman whims of the dictatorial scientists, with their rabid schemes and twisted sense of superiority. Poets and painters are no longer shackled behind grimy counters, doling out pounds of deep fried everything. Novelists do not have to write about moony-eyed teenagers having to choose between two identical idiots. There is freedom, in its rawest and purest form, not mere lip service to the masses. It truly is the closest to paradise this earth will ever reach.

Let me paint a picture in your head - a bunch of quirky people, dressed in visibly homemade clothes and bright hair colors, storming down Wall Street, burning ties, and carrying placards with slogans like 'Say NO to Maths!', and 'All Men & Women Were Created to Create!'. It was an incredible sight, and I wish I was older then so I could recollect more of what

¹ Referencing real-life events like the French Revolution and the Boston Tea Party

² This revolution, and the events referred to after it, are entirely fiction

transpired precisely.

I am a poet, and this year, I have applied to participate in what was formerly known as 'Reality TV'. However, we all know it's not truly possible to capture life as it is on camera, and so rather than perpetuate this abysmal falsehood, we simply refer to these shows by names such as 'The Poet's Program', 'The Oil Painter's Program', and the like. I have been accepted to take part this year, and so as I travel to the headquarters of the Media Channel, the butterflies in my stomach have brought an entire jungle's worth of animals along with them, and I tremble in anticipation.

The first day goes by in a flurry of activity - I meet fellow contestants, get settled into my quarters, and am introduced to the rules of the game. There are pun wars, rhyming rounds, free verse open mics, rap battles, and so much more. We drink like Hemingway one night, and nurse our hangovers the next day in the woods, as we search for Thoreau's elusive way of deliberate living. We peer into the depths of silvery mirrors, trying to find the younger version of ourselves drowned in them, as Sylvia Plath's voice drones on in the background.

It is a transcendental experience, like the trip I took to the ocean when I was a child. Back

then, it was the early days after the revolution, and there were shards of glass all over the wet sand, from the lab equipment thrown out of the nearby university. My brothers and sisters and I wore shoes with thick soles, and the ground crunched under our feet as we ran into the warm water. Hours later, we emerged, fully drenched and delighted, and ate PB&J sandwiches.

I remember feeling so extremely free, like there was nothing I could not achieve when everything was so warm and cozy. I imagine that is how the entire society was feeling, now that art and passion were back on top, and cold logic was shown its place. I went home, freshly inspired, and wrote my first poem about the sun reflecting off the broken pieces of glass into a kaleidoscope of different colors, about how our society was now like those beautiful patterns where everyone could be their bold, unique selves, and somehow, there still was a place for us all. My parents were delighted to discover my hitherto hidden talent, and they encouraged me to take it even further. It is my supreme desire that I win this competition and make them proud.

We received fan mail too, from viewers back at home. They were not allowed to contain epithets, or rhyming words, or any other

suggestions that would give us an unfair advantage, and so were thoroughly scanned before being handed to us. I did not mind the lack of privacy. I knew that if I won like I hoped to, and became famous, it would be something I would have to get used to. I also hoped I would gain the notice of a wealthy patron, so that I could live in comfort and pursue my goals in scholarly leisure. Surely, of all people, a poet can dream!

Finally, the last day of the competition arrived, and I was here on stage, dressed in my best, well, the best that the costume department had to offer. I smoothed out folds and tugged on my hair before the harsh lights and cameras turned on, and I had to turn on my brightest smile and fight the tears threatening to leak out of my heavily mascaraed eyes. I was here, I had made it. I had cruised through all the other rounds, and I deserved to be here. It was everything I had been dreaming about my entire life. However, I did not have any time to let it sink in, or truly feel excited. There was too much riding on the next few hours, and I had to lock all my emotions into a dark box at the back of my brain and play this round with precision. I could not afford to lose.

The bell rang, and the most important event of my life began. Words appeared on a large

screen, 'velvet' and 'green' and 'moonlight' and 'libertine', and notepads and pens were distributed to the few of us that remained. All around me, poets scribbled furiously, ink blotting all over their pages till they were worthy of being at home in a psychiatrist's office.

I looked at the screen, and my note, and willed words to come out of my pen. But my mind froze, and I could only think of the future, not the present. Images of what my life would be like if I failed, attempted to gain my attention, but I realized I had no idea what form such a life would take. Everyone I knew were successful, widely praised, mentioned in research papers and billboards alike. What happens to the failures? If I kept this up, I would soon find out. Pretty soon, time was up. I was not very much inspired by the floating words behind me, and so I used an old poem of mine that I had committed to memory, just for situations like these. When called, I walked to the center of the stage, and pretended to read from the paper, while just spitting out the words that danced in my head. It was a pretty good piece, and I thought my chances were halfway decent at the very least, but as soon as I had finished, the screen behind me turned red, and all the people around me and in the audience started booing.

The first thought that popped in my head was - *How did they know?* Then I metaphorically kicked myself because, of course they did. Of course, the organization that did not even want me to compromise my artistic integrity through suggestions placed in fan mail, would methodically store every sentence I wrote, every scrap of paper I scribbled on. They must have scoured my room and looked at all the verses I wrote for practice, the rhymes I wrote for fun. A sick feeling entered all the cells in my body, and I could not move a muscle. I froze, and I knew it was over for me. To what degree I was ruined was the only question I had.

Later, as I boarded the train that would take me to the outskirts of the city, where I would soon be involved in making household objects and growing food, my parents came into my compartment. I looked up from my gloom, hopeful that I would at least have a cheerful send-off. My parents' stormy faces chided me for my naiveness.

"But there should be a place for everyone here, shouldn't there?", I asked, hoping I could spew some logic and smooth over the whole situation. "Yes", my mother replied, "There is. For everyone with talent". They then left, and the train

chugged on, as I looked out the window,
blinking back tears furiously and wondering why I
kept turning to logic in a world where scientists
were dethroned.