

The  
Archibald Rutledge  
Contest

Sonnets: Italian and Shakespearean

*First Place: The Archibald Rutledge Contest—1978*

**LETTER TO DEATH**

Oh Death, may you be kind and swift and sure;  
A faithful friend who soothes the anguished brow  
And stills tormented limbs with a secure,  
Decisive, quick finale. Don't allow  
My body to spend endless, mindless years  
Attached to ghastly tubes that feed and flood  
The veins; preserved by a machine that clears  
The labored lungs and flogs the laggard blood.

Give me instead the blessing of a blow  
From your sharp scythe. Or one pure draught of pain  
To cleanse me from all dross before I go  
And leave me spent. Ah, thus may I attain  
Nirvana; from Earth's limits find release  
To know the Greater Mystery, and peace.

Mary C. B. Rice

Hendersonville

*Second Honorable Mention: The Charles A. Shull Contest—1976*

**WHEN I LOOK INTO YOUR EYES**

When I look into your eyes I think of April,  
And half-forgotten things come back to me.  
A mist of cherry blossoms in a valley,  
A moon that spread white satin on a sea.

A night of stars and laughter on a hilltop,  
A day I rode with someone in the rain  
That flung a silver curtain on the windshield  
And wrapped us close in sheets of cellophane.

I look into your eyes, and I remember  
A placid river where wild lilies flower,  
And see again a world grow blue with morning.  
How strange, when I have known you but an hour!

*Mary C. B. Rice*

*Hendersonville*



From Bay Leaves The Poetry Council of North Carolina, Inc.

SONNET

There are those moments when you draw so near  
I feel the dazzling radiance of your soul  
Beat down upon me. Yet I do not dare  
To life a finger to the one thin fold  
Of curtain swung between me and such light.  
Think not I am insensitive because  
I make a veil of commonplace and trite  
Remarks, or bandage up my eyes with gauze  
Of laughter. Thru dim years I've groped my way  
(For lack of you) in darkness. I must cloak  
And shield my sight with glasses blurred with smoke  
Of trivial phrases, lest I be as one  
Who is struck blind from gazing at the sun.

-- Mary C. B. Rice

1976-~~77~~

LINES BY A LADY

Adieu, dead dream, go moulder into dust  
You lie with folded hands, so stiff and cold.  
Sheathed in your sable shroud. And now I must  
Entomb what I no longer hope to hold.

You once renewed my life. On dazzling feet  
You brought me water for parched lips to quaff.  
For my starved spirit you were bread and meat.  
I learned once more to live, to love, to laugh.

Though now again a longing's laid away;  
I shall not howl dark dirges for the dead,  
Nor curse my fate, nor, weeping, pray  
For mercy. No, my doom is worse. Instead  
So none must know, I mask my agony.  
Composed, controlled, I'll have some friends to tea.

-- Mary C. B. Rice

1979

## REFUGEE CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

In multicolored plumage, they're like birds  
Far from their jungle home. They flock and perch  
In the drab classroom, twittering English words  
So newly learned--"Allo, see you in church,"  
"O.K.," they say; and smiling, "What do we?"  
Then open books so eagerly to read  
The strange new sounds. Their names as strange to me.  
Tong-Megg, Sok Kek, Sum Tieng, I know your need  
For creature comforts. "For long time we sleep  
Upon the ground. No blanket. No to eat.  
Our father die; our mother sick; we keep  
To walking all the days, with blood on feet."  
Such hope, such pain, endurance, bravery!  
I teach them words. I learn humility.

-- Mary C. B. Rice

1980

## THE MASOCHIST SPEAKS

If you came back again to me some night  
And took my empty hands into your own.  
And said, "My arms are hungry for the  
right  
To hold you. I'm so weary. So alone."

And if you looked at me with tender eyes  
And drew me closer murmuring my name  
Would I be unresponsive, wary, wise?  
Would I be cold or caustic if you came?

No, all the nights of weeping were as naught.  
Forgot the days of loneliness and pain.  
The hard-won wisdom and the peace it  
brought  
Were nothing, could I have you back again.  
Trifles they'd be to fling into the street.  
If you came back to me on eager feet.

-- Mary C. B. Rice

1983