

# American Songwriter

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the craft of music

PLUS  
**RODNEY  
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The Next Great  
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SUFFERING JUKEBOX

# LYRIC CONTEST

# 1ST

# PLACE

## **"If I Were A Bottle"**

**Samantha Elin**  
Tarzana, California

If I were a bottle of tequila  
Would you love me then  
Would you dance with me through the town  
'Til the moon's untimely end

If I were a bottle of red wine  
Would you want me every night  
Would you rush on home to see me  
In the glow of firelight

Would you lie atop a hill  
Staring at the sky  
Would your fingers trace my neck  
As stars came sailing by

If I were a silver flask of whiskey  
Would you keep me close to your chest  
Would your lips hover so near  
I'd always feel your warm breath

If I were a shot glass of bourbon  
Would you feel mellow and kind  
Or would you hold on so tight  
Afraid love would unwind

Would you lie atop a hill  
Staring at the sky  
Would your fingers trace my neck  
As stars came sailing by

If I were a bottle of tequila  
Would you love me then?

# 2ND

# PLACE

## **"Rock A Bye Sin"**

**Jim Greene**  
Santa Cruz, California

Baby clothes, on a clothesline  
In a backyard, in the wind  
Come the rain, come the sunshine  
No one takes that laundry in

Now that mama ain't no mother  
And that papa's got no son  
And I wonder what they're doing  
Should I let the bloodhounds run?

Rock a bye, rock a bye baby  
Rock a bye, rock a bye gin  
Rock a bye, rock a bye baby  
Rock a bye, rock a bye sin

There's a lamp post, on a corner  
In the middle of the night  
There's a lawman, and a preacher  
In a solid cone of light

Now that lawman holds a Bible

While the preacher holds a gun  
And I wonder  
while they're praying  
Should I let the bloodhounds run?

Rock a bye, rock a bye baby  
Rock a bye, rock a bye gin  
Rock a bye, rock a bye baby  
Rock a bye, rock a bye sin

There's a blood stain, on a counter  
Where the banker bought the farm  
Close the vaults lock the doorway  
because all the money's gone

There's a screaming  
freight train whistle  
In the distant morning sun  
And I wonder while it's rolling  
Should I let the bloodhounds run?

Rock a bye, rock a bye baby  
Rock a bye, rock a bye gin  
Rock a bye, rock a bye baby  
Rock a bye, rock a bye sin



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TO ENTER THE NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018 CONTEST



# AMERICAN SONGWRITER LYRIC CONTEST Q&A

## 1ST PLACE

### "If I Were A Bottle"

Written by Samantha Elin

Interview by Caine O'Rear

**How did the song "If I Were A Bottle" come about?**

I was seeing someone who, let's just say, enjoyed his alcohol. He was not a mean guy — quite sweet — but it was a frustrating time. I think whenever you're involved with someone like that, you can't help feeling sometimes that the person is more enchanted with the bottle and what it contains than with you. The concept of putting myself in the bottle's place was quite spur of the moment. I didn't sit down and decide "I want to write a song about this." The first line just randomly popped into my head one day, and I decided to go further with it. Originally I thought it was headed in the direction of a funny song. That's not at all where it ended up.

**Have you written music for this song? If so, how would you describe it?**

Yes, I have. Again, a song I thought would be more humorous and jaunty actually coalesced into a bittersweet folk song with a very spare arrangement — just my vocals, acoustic guitar and Dobro.

**How long have you been writing songs? Do you have a tried and true writing process that you typically follow?**

I'll never forget timidly sharing that first song in 2006 with my then-guitar teacher Howard Yearwood. He said, "Good, write another." I'm thankful he kept things positive and didn't tear apart that initial attempt. I'm not sure I would have kept on writing — mentors like that are crucial. I know some writers who follow a strict regimen — every day they carve out time to write. I am not particularly methodical about it. Sometimes it's scrawled lyrics on a post-it, a napkin, envelope, only to be revisited a year later when I come across them again. But usually, I either have a concept or theme in mind and sit down with the guitar and start fleshing out the lyrics and music at the same time. But sometimes I just strum chords and an idea sprouts, seemingly out of nowhere. Often I find the simplest songs, the ones I don't overthink, are the songs people respond to the most.

**Do you ever collaborate or co-write with fellow songwriters?**

Yes. The real fun can be in the accidental collaborations. Bob Gothar, who plays on "If I Were a Bottle," was noodling around on the guitar one day. I ran in and asked, "What's that you're playing?" He said it wasn't anything really. To him it was guitar gibberish. I heard it differently. So I recorded him right away and later created lyrics for it. It's also an interesting experiment to take half a song and write the lyrics and give the other half to someone else who may tend to write in a different style. It works sometimes.

**Is there a line from the song that you're particularly proud of?**

Probably "Would you feel mellow and kind, or would you hold on so tight, afraid love would unwind?" I like when writers use uncommon combinations of words. It's not typical to describe love as unwinding, so I was happy when I came up with that. I have no idea where it came from — just a rhyme for "kind" I guess.

**Who are some of your favorite songwriters, and why?**

Paul Simon and Rodney Crowell. There's an elegance and eloquence in their storytelling, and Crowell has the rare ability to write a stunning ballad that never veers toward sappiness. Lucinda Williams is all about economy in writing — she captures so much heartache with so few words. Simple imagery but powerful. Mark Knopfler in his solo career has been the opposite. Very wordy but wonderful. A guy who loves history and can take subject matter like the Mason-Dixon line or Napoleon and fashion these engaging songs full of the most vivid detail.

**What are the goals for your songwriting?**

To keep meeting other songwriters. To keep recording. To perform my songs publicly more and more. To create something — a thought, an idea, an image — that wasn't there before. There's something thrilling about the beginning of the process of writing a new song — you're staring at the blank paper and then the song just kind of grabs your hand and takes you along for the ride. As I'm writing, sometimes I'm surprised by where it takes me. The fun truly is in the journey. ★



Photo courtesy Samantha Elin

## MEET OUR 2018 JUDGES

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