A Prince's Fairy Tale

Tim Schumann

What is a prince?
Is his heart warm and pure?
Gifted with gracious nature,
And a charming allure.

Must he ride a white charger,
And only rescue the fair maid?
Dashing off to battle,
To woo his lovely mate.

But, what if instead,
Love has a different plan?
Can't this dashing young prince,
Love a fair nobleman?

In the form of the male,
Lies his heart's desire.
Where in this quest,
He'll discover a loving admirer.

The affection of his eye,
Need not be one of fair hue.
Or hair of spun gold,
Or skin delicate and smooth.

Perhaps it's a poor man,
Face dirtied as a peasant.
Or a fat, wealthy heir,
So jolly and eminent.

He seeks out a man,
Engaging, yet different.
Knowing his heart will sing,
When they meet that instant.

At last the day doth come,
When his gentleman arrives.
Specifics are not needed,
But knowing their love combines.

The romances in all fairy tales,
As often is thought,
Shall always remain formulistic,
But this story does not.

The happy ending for these men,
Will last for all eternity.
The love they share for one another,
Conquers all adversity.
MEAT LOCKER: A LOVE STORY
Shawn Gomes

The thought of showering in a meat locker is a terrifying prospect, and that's exactly what I'm staring at with a towel in my hand. I'm somewhere in Arizona at a truck stop that name starts with "Crazy," and I haven't showered in three days. The sign for this truck stop was screaming at me from several miles away, blinking orange words like the opening and closing of a mouth. A pixelated flag waves inside the sign telling me about America's Freedom. Then the blaring sign recited the following: Showers. Kerosene. Fuel. Restaurant. Souvenirs. Mitchell.

GIRLS GIRLS GIRLS

"Look Pal, It's Santa!" is the first thing that comes out of my mouth when the car keys kill the engine in front of this promising establishment. Someone waddled out from the rear of the building, haloed by neon red. The Open sign behind the person has an accompanying directional arrow, just in case you don't know where the showers are.

If the image of Santa wasn't burned into my head at least a million times, I would describe him as a person with a gelatinous stomach that's trying to escape its host by oozing its way out of his shirt. The pants gave up a long time ago at thwarting the efforts of the stomach - they're cowardly resting where his crotch could be. I'm not even sure if he can zip up, but Santa is mindlessly grappling his zipper with a grin on his white beard that tells me he justucked Santa's little helper with no chance of Mrs. Claus finding out. His belly button might have wrinkled at me with a yellow filled eye as it got into the cab of the sixteen-wheeler.

The building looming around the front door is a whore house, restaurant, convenience store, and garage mortared together to compose one brick abomination. The first line of windows showcases the diner portion of the mixed building with a row of rounded, cushioned seats lining a dirty or polka-dotted counter. One is taken by a hefty man in a red shirt, presumably the driver of the sole unoccupied truck outside. The cook opposing him consists of smiles and grease stains, and the discussion seems essential because he is wildly gesturing with a browned spatula.

The smell reminds me of low-tide in New Jersey, and the girl behind the convenience store counter looks 30, but is probably 20. The skin under her eyes is drooping like a tarp filling with water. It's as if this small portion of her face weighed 100 pounds more when she was younger, and now that she lost weight, the excess is a deformed pancake. Her skin has a tinge of yellowed ash and the parts of flesh that the cigarettes haven't infiltrated are pockets of egg-white. There seems to be a cloud of dirt that follows her, and I can almost make out a pavement heat, dirt haze that quivers when she turns the pages of a magazine.

I yelled out, "Showers?", and watched for the dirt to shift. She points off to my left like a witch sending out a swarm of locusts, a motion she has done frequently, because her point is accurate without a visual reference. She never looks up from the magazine she has forcefully immersed herself in to surpass the lackluster hours of the night.

I hear the girl strike up a fiery conversation with a trucker wearing a sleeveless jean jacket and green pants. The voice from her is alarming. It's not as smooth as honey, because that would imply a thickness and slow movement to her speech. The words are streaming over the counter and coating my ears in warmth. I can see why the 30-something male she is talking to is intensely fascinated and ferociously nodding. Coupled with her skillful talk of an obscure band, it's almost enough to give me an erection.

The shower door is a freezer door from a shit-hole restaurant, all grey, plain steel, monstrously heavy, with a sense of, "you're not leaving this room when you close my gaping maw." The tile room is tremendously lit by landing strips disguised as lights. No dark shadows. The door cringes a warning sound as I muscle it closed. The light switch toggles between on and off. The door locks with a sliding metal ruler missing the measurement numbers. I struggle the door handle and jerk backwards to check the locking mechanism's ability to remain locked under stress. Positive/negative results: I'm sealed in tight.

The water turns on efficiently. I was expecting some creature to start squealing from the plumbing lurking in the wall. The visible pipe starts bellowing while I wait for the water temperature to heat up. I'm paranoid from the smallest of sounds, and the furious pipe sticking out of the wall is providing plenty of startles.

I've already mapped out several different ways to defend myself. I'm picturing myself naked for the first time in a situation not concerning sexual activity or water sports. The end of my toothbrush can be used for striking pressure points under the chin, and in the temple, shoulder, and arm. The soap works as practical projectile weapon, and also makes me slippery to protect against grappling opponents. The shampoo makes my hair smell nice.

I surmise the conversation in the restaurant is over; both of the men have gone missing. I'm staring at the vacant space at the diner's counter when my friend starts pleading me to safeguard the shower entrance from infiltration while he has it occupied. I shrug, smile, and tell him to watch out for the hair monster hiding in the drain, the banshee in the pipes and, "Don't drop the soap," just because I think it's manufactured in my male genetics to advise against dropping the soap when discussing showering procedures.
GOOD ENOUGH
Steph Grimm

Before the dementia and the first day he could no longer finish The New York Times crossword puzzle, my poppy went on a business trip to the San Juan Islands off the coast of Washington. When he returned, he showed my mom a picture of a beach he had visited on the main island and told her that was where he wanted his ashes spread.

When Poppy passed away, we had his memorial service at Fort Warden State Park, not at San Juan Island, though only an hour’s drive upstate and a ferry ride away; that would have been inconvenient for my mother’s siblings. We all wore white and stood in a circle on the Puget Sound shore, and took turns trading memories because that’s what you’re supposed to do. The calming hush of waves absent, our words hung heavy in the baking sun. I poked my red skin with my index finger and watched as the print turned white.

I didn’t say anything because what I remember is how Pop watched PBS, had wheat bread instead of white, and used spoons with fake wooden handles. He would recite Jabberwocky—Twas brillig, and the slithy toves— or speak German— Wie geht’s?— to me when we talked on the phone every Sunday, and now if we had nothing else to talk about, we’d talk about the weather. None of those things seemed important.

The ashes plopped into the water in spurts. Pip, Pip. Pip. Pip—nothing like in movies where the ashes are whisked gracefully away on a swirling wind. I watched my mom bring the box back to where we stood and place the lid over the remaining ashes.

After everyone else had flown home, Mom and I took the 3:10 ferry from Anacortes to Friday Harbor, San Juan Island, and bought a four-dollar map at a store called Pelindaba Lavender, the heady scent of which still lingers on the folded paper.

She didn’t know the name of the beach in Poppy’s picture, so we picked one from the map—walked past the tourist shops, into the residential area with street names like Cherry and turned left onto Pear Point Road, which ran into Jackson Beach. I sat on a large piece of driftwood while Mom took off her Keds and the socks with the purple pom-poms at the heel, rolled up her jeans, and took a Ziploc baggie of my grandfather’s ashes out of her backpack. The tiny pop of the seal unlocking made me wince.

She waded into the water, spoke words I could not hear, and turned the bag upside down. There was no wind and it was low tide, the ashes settled in gray shapes around my mother’s legs. We sat at a beach entirely different from the beach of Poppy’s photograph, with the empty plastic bag, laughing and crying at the same time because we could both see him in his beige, corduroy recliner nodding slowly and saying gut genug, good enough.

SNARES OF THE ENEMY
Brian Mahoney

Leaving after assault
The deserted skeletons
Lay under shadows, gone
Where the prowess
Divides weak from strong,

Surviving the crossfire,
Remaining troops came back,
To rest easy and retire
In a forsaken shack.

Chests fume out and skipping
Heart beats jolt centerfold
By cannons colliding, hence ripping
The tin-sheeted roof in mere seconds
Dust shower’s scalps and mold
Filters a foul stench.

An open wave of marble shots in the air
Surge my brothers’ bones, cold and bare.
Who knew the Grim Reaper that day?
His touch inescapable.
Gossamer fingers of the sun’s ray.
A Ghost of Skin and Bone
Lauren Shields

a man wakes up
and opens his curtains
this is his day
accentuated by
forward steps
going nowhere

he has become
deaf
to the sounds
of the dry brittle
leaves rattling
like bones
down the avenue
and he has become
blind
to the wilting
flowers
untouched by
the warmth
of sunlight
and unaware
of the ghosts
whose solemn faces

search for the truth
a man goes to bed,
and closes his eyes
this is his night
adorned with dreams
seemingly forgettable

he has become
deaf
to the laughter
of his children
in their room
and has become
blind
to the love
of his wife who sleeps
beside him
and unaware
of the simple truth
that life
is not
dead

THE MAN IN THE BLACK ROBE

If misery was currency
I'd be a wealthy man
I see the face of a widow
And remember the kind man
I took from her
I wish it wasn't so
Wars, I hate them most
I come in here
And come in there
And take lives from both
While you're reading this
I'm off somewhere
Killing someone else
Whose number just came up

I think of me, and the irony
Of what it is I do
By taking things, I replace things
When I end life, I create strife
But people curse my name

Without me, and my tyranny
This world'd be overrun
I kill all to save all
And people curse my name

I'm not the bastard you
Think I am
But I'm the bastard
That you need
He shines with the light of compassion, 
Believing in the healing of one's self. 
Remaining true to who he is, 
And knowing of what is within.

Escaping from his lips, 
Emergence the simple words of wisdom. 
In a tone sweet as the nightingale, 
Spread forth the moral words.

Music is the essence of his soul, 
Precious harmony surging through his veins. 
For melody holds the meaning of his life, 
Each note the beginning of a new day.

He knows the art of timeless love, 
Experiencing himself the sensual desires. 
The charm and beauty of the woman, 
And the deep passion of a man.

His words of lyrical speech, 
All dwell within me. 
Of knowing the life of a musical note, 
And the romance for man and woman.

He is a part of me.

misplaced memories stacked up on the highest shelf, 
found in foreign countries squeezed tightly shut in one sweaty hand...

It was like they said, though. 
A strange entrapment sent trances through the nation like some earthquake tidal wave, 
our eyes glued shut to that damn television, 
set to permanent snow-fuzz.

not until the blast came, 
an explosion of universal magnitude, 
that woke up long-lost souls slumbering in soft-rock monasteries:

Two thousand twelve of us left with gaping mouths, 
like a hole in the fence. 
Lambs fleeing from the wolves, 
catching dandelion seeds on our tongues;

those misplaced memories, 
found.
Early Monday:
Lime, cherry, Barbie pink, and aquamarine polka-dotted nylon protects me from rain and blank exchanges with miserable others on their way to anywhere but here beside the storm drain clogged with leaves and empty cans of Natty Light.

Once I dreamt my umbrella became a jellyfish and I was left holding the tentacles
GETTING RID OF THE HALO

Kevin White

The one that I love, she doesn't even have a favorite flower.
Our words always crash like blind cars at a deaf intersection.

We push each other against the grain day in and day out
And in sickness and in health, we keep that ritual as if it was our child.

On dark highways and light back roads
We talk in circles as if we've run out of squares.

I don't know how much longer we can keep forgiving ourselves
As we both got rid of our halos a long time ago.

The summer and winter both gave up time for us to live
But the spring and fall only closes the door for us to grow.

I don't know well enough to say goodbye
Because this distance is the only thing I've truly learned in the last year.

An old friend told me that time heals all, and I believe her,
It might be the only thing that will save our sanity.

We shake and shiver like the final leaves on the tree
And until I can grasp and hold onto her for eternity

I have to accept the fact that we will never be angels
That we are devils with broken hearts on short sleeves.

SLEEP PAST THE DEADLINE DATE

Kevin White

Simple winds burn past our sleepy eyes
Takes our wildest whims and places them
in morning love
And grips us at our tired throats where we cannot speak.

Instead we turn to our cold restless hands
Where you have wrists of orange dots that say,
"Imagine", "Fear is the heart of love", and "peace"
Sprawled out on your skin, like moments of rain,
Where significance and magnificence come together.

And I remain here as still as can be, begging for words
That when matched with others, slows the heartbeat so

Our paralytic bodies can write our tales of spiral poetry.
Can you now believe, when our lips, as quiet as dawn,
Fit together like a slit in the wall, like a hand in another,
Like a leaf that coats the ocean and holds falling snow,
Can you now understand, that as deadlines burn
and crust over,
The sweet fractals of life become genuine and sincere.

Like a whisper in the wind,
Like a ruby tied to your heart with string.
We remain together in explosion,
Where portraits stay hanging on walls,
Where grass carries the teardrops of angels
in the morning light,
Where the wetness of water and the sweetness of kisses
Shift and smother into a room of their own,
and ride like waves
That go under the tables we refuse to turn.
Partners
Chelsea Brink

Five fingers, soft and firm, are draped delicately
Over the velvet hide of Butch, the couple’s dog.
Noticeably white teeth shy from the camera:
Naked, uncovered from the veil of thin, masculine lips.
Downcast eyes glance at something interesting,
Apparently amusing, on a laptop screen resting
Between two jean-clad knees. Another curled hand

Lies uncomfortably upon a sweathered shoulder.
Where are the scarves, bandannas, and earrings?
These men are hardly flamboyant. Middle-aged, boring.
They appear as at ease with themselves, and their sexuality
As society. Something’s not right here.

I imagine the photographer saying, “Put your hand here.
Like this, yes, that looks natural.”
I’m sure Butch preferred his spot in the kitchen.
The laptop belongs on the desk, that lamp is never on.
I imagine these two in their robes in the morning.
There is coffee on their breath, as they rub sleep
From their sticky eyes. They stumble about the
Breakfast nook in goofy, personalized slippers,
Munching on toast.
SLEEPING THROUGH THE RAIN
Jill Daub

A thunderstorm rumbles outside the four walls, rain against the window’s glass. Wind blows, trees dance in the powerful force; yet, beneath our blankets and sheets, our hearts beat. Connecting as one: instinct. I can feel your breath against my cheek, the heavy breathing of a deep sleep. Your one arm, tucked under the pillow, the other wrapped around my waist. As I lay nestled in your embrace, I think: I give you everything: my heart, my soul, my everlasting love.

ANN C. WALSH’S REPEITION
Megan Doran

“Aunt Mary hates red Potatoes. She won’t eat them. I never knew why.”
There was romance.
In sitting on the bus alone.
When my headphones covered my ears.
And indie music played to the rhythm of the city.

There were smells, city smells.
That would rise up from the street and meet your face.
Smells of sewers and dead things,
Smells of coffee shops and fast food.

There was snow
And I remember walking to the bus stop on Pius
And slipping so that my jeans were soaked and caked with ice
Leaving wet marks on the bus seat for the next passenger to curse.

There was calling you.
Calling you often.
And thinking, at the time, that Pittsburgh is cold
But the feeling of being trapped is much worse.

And then there were apples in front of the cathedral
And reading alone on the grass behind the science building
And leaves blowing through Pittsburgh streets.

But mostly, there was romance.
The romance of loneliness and the 54C
When I was Oakland bound
And you were more than just miles away.

The Lily
Jill Daub

A seed blossoming:
delicate and pure.
Growing strong,
with the touch of beautiful sunlight
and quenching raindrops.

Hand of a landscaper:
yanking, pulling, uprooting.
Stealing a fragile flower
from its development.

This is the ending of innocence,
beginning of deflowering.
No matter the touch,
against the cotton-white shirt
a lily still leaves its stain.
DYSFUNCTIONAL
Allison Ferrier

He preached
He hurt
She fell off the wagon
Most never climbed on
She lies
So have I
He misses the old flame
He'll always miss that old dame
He's falling apart
Somehow we smile
She hurries
He passes out early
He judges
She doesn't judge as much
She's less quiet
She's hardly ever around
Why isn't he good enough?
Are you perfect?
He's old enough to do his dirt
Just like family
He's hurt pretty deep now
We all self-medicate
Almost on the daily
Pathetic really
The most imperfect people
Ever on one bloodline
Messed up as all hell
Not even ashamed
Kind of bittersweet confusion
Even in a cloud
Still feel like a robot
Going through the motions
We know our compulsions by heart
Some have potential,
dormant for years
What we see in each other
A proud moment
We're all broken
Want to smile
Sometimes lovers
Always fools
"Functioning (Place Your Issue Here)"

BECAUSE I FORGOT
Jenna Youse

to leave the light on,
to close the fridge,
to make sure the door was locked,
to not drink beer,
because it's not lady like,
to enter my closing time at work last night.

my keys,
my jump drive,
my credit card at the bar,
my sequined notebook with all my writings,
my Claddagh ring in family foods class in high school.

your birthday,
your scent—rain kissed incents,
your smirk, when
to not kiss boys that aren't my boyfriend.

that I didn't have gas,
that I still have last night's makeup on,
and that in the beginning,

you did give me butterflies.
NEVER HOME
Cory Walton

He sits at the bar and stares as familiar faces melt away Replaced with foreign faces that look at him with wild fear

His hands begin to tremble He looks at the tanned bodies of men, women, and children he gunned down on command

He wonders why they’re here How they got into the bar His stomach turns upside down as he begins to shake and sob

His girlfriend sees the attack coming Knows the hysteria that will grip his mind as he relives the horrors, the way he always does in public

She throws money down, hurries him out of the smoke The screaming will come soon Five medications don’t always work

Later, on his soft couch that scratches like desert sand He tells himself he’s not in the Jeep’s turret, he’s home

SALAMANDER
Jess Siegfried

Cave dwellers evolve In isolation. Each one different from The last. Silence echoes Off sunken cavities within The skull. Cannot see Out, cannot see In. Subterranean void Yawning soundlessly, No matter, in this abyss.

I have evolved To have no eyes. Only gashes and scarring where Once my mother had eyes, Deep secret wells dried up.

Sour sulfur drips from Vestigial circles. No hint of sunlight. No fire behind. Only filaments and bulbs And glowworm constellations.

I have evolved To have no pigment. This un-sun has washed Off and down the drain Like some feigned purity. Now, we stare across Together toward our Separate caverns because Cave dwellers evolve In isolation.
AN Imitation of Lorca's Terrifying Presence

Jenna Youse

I want the roads to stop supporting all the vehicles and the moon to forget to change places with the sun.

I want the streetlights to all go missing and for all the horns in the world to beep in unison.

What if the Vegas strip lost all of its lights and the businessmen stopped having glorious affairs?

I want snakes to bite all the sinners and the stitches in my heart to unhinge.

I can see all of the poor's prickly hands grabbing and the money in the slot machine's disappearing.

I fight with the damsel's in distress in their ivory towers and weep with the virgin's over bloody sheets.

But don't let my black mascara misinterpret what I mean like not paying your bills when you do have the money.

Leave me in the road, with no streetlights, with businessmen and the poor but do not expect me to stay the night.

LAND OF THE FREE

David Brown

Past a checkpoint a family of four turns into red spray, fleshy pieces, burning rubber, fire and smoke, and the car stops as it smashes into the one in front of it. A man releases a dove and it is threatening; not a millisecond passes and where his head once rested is stained skull bones and eye guts. The bullies from my high school became my countries heroes, but they were still no heroes of mine. The most inspiring words our country has ever heard is "I'll kill fucking anybody at any fucking time."

Free this country from the dirty country of the free, where illusions prevail and faith will flourish. I do not consider this my land; I do not want to shake the hand of the murderers, villains, and those who are lost.

What have we lost? Our sons, our brothers, our fathers, our mothers, our friends, our sisters, our trust, our sanity, our morals, our freedom.

What have we gained?

My son will be made in deep-frying oil; my daughter will be planted in pesticides. I'll be married in a church with an absent God, with a question mark on top instead of a cross.
SNOW GLOBE
Megan Doran
I shake you up and watch the snow fall
Quickly, and not pretty, not like on postcards.
I think it’s home.
Hundreds of feet walking along plastic concrete
Working in paper buildings
And riding in standstill trains.
I can barely see William, our good luck charm
And there is no Comcast building yet,
our bad luck charm.
I choose if it’s night or day
And if the weather is clear or frigid
I don’t think Mr. Nutter would appreciate it
But then again, maybe it’s better this way,
Looking from the outside, in.
At a small world with just a skyline.

NOSTALGIA
Don Connolly
I remember when the scarcest man in the world
was my dad
When judging some one was only done by how
many Pokemon cards a kid had
When negligence was the ice cream man not
coming to my block
When the closest thing to a buzz was eating a
whole bag of Pop Rocks
When “wait, you like GI Joes too?” was how a true
friendship was made
When my only ambition was creating the first
ever school water fountain that sprayed Kool-Aid
When in-house corruption led to no video games
for two weeks
When I thought that Will Smith’s “Gettin’ Jiggy Wit
It” was a lyrical masterpiece
When realistic drama and misfortune was the
movie Home Alone
When a heart-wrenching dilemma was “do I want
my ice cream in a cup or a cone?”
When divorce among my friend’s parents was zero
When Zack Morris from Saved by the Bell
Was the epitome of an American hero
When reality TV was watching O.J. almost get away
When being broken-hearted was, “She told me
to tell you she only likes you as a friend”—hey, it
was a good two days
When I would smoke pretzel rods and blow to the
sky pretending it was a cigar
And drink cream soda because it looked like beer,
and that picnic table was my bar
When the term “race” was nothing but a 50-yard dash
When sexism was only “oh come on, no girl can
play football in gym class”
When cops and robbers only existed within the
parameters of the school
When hating your sister, thinking girls had
cooties, and atrocious 90’s techno was cool
When spiders and the God forsaken dentist
were my only fears
When anxiety and stress was just a pimple
And I remember when life and all of these
concepts were just that simple
I guess you could say I’m a little nostalgic.
**Scribble Hunter**

Katherine Kramer

sideways earache
headache
backache
Locks bind the pain to degrees
Nothing seems as Painful
Until the wind breezes past
and now it screams back
two times fold
But someone kisses it away

Nameless
The search begins
in a tree, where there are no trees
in cold slime, but the rain continues
three days more
Has the confusion set in?
Punctuation. Punctuation!
Yes, the grammar blinds the ache
together - to one
Retracing steps, just like a hunter
the prey is unknown
But once you get a whiff
the hair, the skin, the intoxicating breath
There's something known
you can't place it
And the plot thickens
spur the horse, clues are gathering
just like a detective
she sits in the tree - tree of wonder, tree of life
straddling the branch
sideways pain, blinding white
Ellipsis...

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**Gray to Red**

Cheryl Geiger Sheeler

I have felt the color gray
And the way
It fills the clouds and rains
Stinging me with icy gloom
And wraps my heart in chains
To hold me in a lonely tomb
Where 'senses fail and purpose wanes
I have felt the color gray

I have felt the color blue
When it's true
And brazen in the sky
Like a robin's egg so deep
In a lascious summer sigh
Where no clouds dare to creep
It beckons me to fly
I have felt the color blue

I have felt the color yellow
Lying mellow
Upon the day's descent
In a tranquil glowing line
With the setting sun's intent
To render me supine
'Til it's final rays are spent
I have felt the color yellow

I have felt the color red
In our bed
When it rises from a blush
And burns into a heat
Blood coursing with the rush
Until we finally meet
Then linger in the hush
I have felt the color red
DOOMSDAY SONATA

Jess Siegfried

The flickering heat is an overture for the eventual diminuendo.
We stand and perceive at the gildengold gates, holding our applause until the end.
Quaking earth shakes each brick by brick in a shuddering Waltz,
And the trickling panes present the melody we dance to.

We stand and perceive at the gildengold gates, holding our applause until the end.
The sunset bruises the sky in electric blacks and blues,
And the trickling panes present the melody we dance to.
I see her scaling the avenues of the white-walled town.

The sunset bruises the sky in electric blacks and blues,
Moon and Sun, the symbols that defined us clash,
I see her scaling the avenues of the white-walled town.
She pirouettes along the twanging of her own yelps.

Moon and Sun, the symbols that defined us clash.
The aria is clear and ready for the approach.
I pirouette along the twanging of my own yelps.
The chorus joins in the mummuring crescendo.

The aria is clear and ready for the approach.
As the Moon returns to her tonic tides.
The chorus joins in the mummuring crescendo,
Singing, "Does it explode? No, not with a bang but a whimper."

As the Moon returns to her tonic tides,
The flickering heat is an overture for the eventual diminuendo.
Singing, "Does it explode? No, not with a bang, but a whimper,"
The quaking earth shakes each brick by brick in a shuddering Waltz.
Cruel, Cruel Game

Julie Mokrzycki

Do words resent it
when we
“man, lip, you late”
them?
Does it make them
feel powerless,
being at
the mercy of the pen?

Do they enjoy it
when we make a
)] play (]
on them
or is it just a
cruel, cruel game?

Do words feel the strain
as we
stretch
them through the
vastness of our minds?

Do they squirm when
[forced to conform]
under pressure
of being shrunk
to the often pettiness
of our thoughts?

Hope of all hopes,
do words experience
Elation!
when everything
falls into place
fits so perfectly
and makes it all
worthwhile?
Pain's End
Melissa Lemke

My brain feels like it's melting,
I don't know what to do,
I feel like the pressure is mounting,
And I have no where to turn to,
What happened to those carefree times?
What happened to my life?
Everyone wants something different,
All I feel is that strife,
I turn to you, my soul companion,

My pen and ink and keyboard,
To soothe the pain, the stress, the silence,
You become my bloody sword,
The way to dig out the arrow's end,
As it pierces through my heart,
But you will leave in due time,
I'm afraid I knew that from the start.

The Color Wheel
Cheryl Geiger Sheeler

What happens to the snowy white
That veils the earth brown of the field
Giving glory to the full moon's light
As it smothers Mother Nature's yield
Then melts away to spoil the show
Where does the lovely whiteness go?

What happens to the petal pink
That blushes in the springtime dawn
A tender virgin morning wink
To kiss the sweet and dewy lawn
Then summer's fire starts to blow
Where does the gentle pinkness go?

What happens to the leafy green
That crowns the tall majestic trees
And makes a lively verdant scene
As it dances in the summer breeze
Then disappears in Autumn's glow
Where does the vibrant greenness go?

What happens to the molten gold
That from the harvest moon does spill
As it dangles low and looming bold
To try to chase away the chill
Then pales against the frosty snow
Where does the daring goldness go?
OUR VERSATILE OAK TREE

Dan Connolly

There was this enormous oak tree
That stood in the front yard of the house I grew up in
But it was more than just a tree with branches, leaves, and roots
It was our house’s shade during those dreadful summer days
It was our personal jungle gym in the spring
With its arm sticking out holding onto the frail and beat up rope swing
Its breeze was the song of the season, but lacked instruments in the winter
The tree only gave us joy, unless, of course, it gave you a splinter
It was anything our imagination wanted it to be
We were designated branches as the tree’s hierarchy
And I was the youngest, so naturally, I was the peasant subjected to the inferno below
It was our majestic castle and we’d be marveled by kids that would come and go
It was our train across country today, and tomorrow, our sailboat on the sea
It was our stepladder to the sun and our spaceship to the moon
But it was back to the front yard in time because mom will be home soon
And as the tree grew, we grew, and eventually we had to move
But it was only to the next street, and in my new yard I could still see it if I jumped
Until our once, jungle gym, castle, train, sailboat, stepladder, spaceship and whatever else we chose—
Became nothing but a stump
So through this, I resurrect the tree that helped hold so many childhood memories
As is if we were life-size picture frames and it was our shelf
Yet maybe, our versatile oak tree also formed paper, and helped resurrect itself

SLAM DUNK

Julie Mokrzycki

Determined to invent
the next best thing, we brainstorm
bouncing ideas off one another
Giving suggestions, ridiculous possibilities
— deep laughter and tears —
We are epic, eternal
Our brilliance astounds us
We could make millions
but the ideas themselves
are satisfaction enough
We could change the world
but instead we crumple the paper
—slam dunk into the trash—
There was something about this party that had him feeling indifferent. The moment he arrived in the crowded hotel suite, immediately he thought he should've stayed home. The music was too loud and he felt alone in the crowded room. He began pushing his way through the sweaty partygoers to the open bar. Behind the bar was a desolate pool glistening in the distance. The boy felt his shaggy brown hair getting damp from the thick, airless atmosphere. He sat down at the bar and asked for something strong.

While he tried in vain to enjoy this party, his mind kept wondering back to the serene pool. A tumbler of scotch appeared and he smelled it, feeling it burn before it even began to slide down his throat. He took a sip and sighed, shaking as the alcohol hit his veins. The noise was numbing to his ears and the sights were becoming a blur. He felt the bass thump in his chest and saw smears of color before him. He was unwanted, out of place.

Kicking back the last drop of scotch, he stood and contemplated the party for a moment, waiting for something to entice him. Instead, he felt a calm from behind. Turning, he peered at the eerie calm of the shimmering pool and walked to its edge, a force much larger than him putting one foot in front of the other. Silence now echoed deep in his body. He looked down at his reflection, waving at him from below.

"Hey!" he heard a soft voice call from the dark corner on the other side of the room, "don't jump in!" she cautioned. He shook his head, turning his attention from the dark corner and up to the serene, liquid ceiling. He glanced at his surroundings once more and felt a chill go up his spine. In a moment of terror, he tried to run back to the party but found the rest of the space empty and never ending.

"Where am I?" he questioned, turning back to the calm voice.

"Be careful!" she called.

"What...what happened to the party? Where is everybody?"

"I only wish I knew. They're all gone. You'll learn to get used to it."

She floated along the ground as she emerged from her dark corner of life. Her auburn hair drifted along behind her as she approached. He tried to lift his hand, but it moved as if treading a denser material. Panic set in and he tried running, but he wasn't going anywhere.

"What's wrong?" she asked. He looked up at the ceiling, the area above him tiny, lapping waves. He looked at the pool again, peering down. He saw no reflection. He turned to look at the girl once more who was staring at him with blank eyes.

"I think I jumped in," he noted, dropping to his knees. The girl knitted her eyebrows together.

"Strange. I've been here for a long time and never thought I'd jumped in. I can't swim, but I wanted to be alone so I sat by the pool. I just assumed everyone left me here, I am, honestly, used to that." He looked at her lovely, languid face, her red hair still curiously buoyant behind her.

"How do we get out?"

"As far as I know, we don't. How did we get here in the first place? To know where you're going, you have to know where you've been," she replied, her tone oddly calm. He began to worry now, was he really stuck here forever? He stood and looked at the pool again this time he stuck his hand under the surface, surprised by what he felt. It wasn't more water, but cool central air. He pulled his hand back and turned his attention once more to the girl, who was now floating gently back to her dark corner.

"Don't you want to find the way home?" he wondered.

"Home lost me a long time ago," she replied, "No, I'm happy here on my own, with just endless time. I'm better here."

"But, don't you get lonely? Don't you ever wish you had someone to talk to?" she shook her head and smiled softly.

"No. My mind is all I need," she quipped and disappeared, her hair the last thing he saw. The boy felt sorry for her, second-guessing his plight to be all alone. To become a part of something, you have to be a part of it, you mustn't sit around and wait for it to fuse itself to you.

"Goodbye..." he said, taking a deep breath, sticking his hands into the unreffecting surface, followed by his head and body. An icy chill set over him as he tumbled forward before he felt his feet firmly on the ground. He lifted his hand and felt odd as it sliced through the air with no restriction. He had almost gotten used to the waterlogged feeling.

He looked down and saw his face wave in the water beneath him. He backed up quickly and felt his body bump up against someone and turned around quickly to see a girl with auburn hair smile at him peacefully, her eyes full of life.

"Have a nice swim?" she asked him. He looked down at his clothes and realized he was soaked, feeling a swift chill slide over him.

"Well, maybe..." He looked over his shoulder at the pool, placid as ever. He turned back to the scene before him, as the music once again pierced his ears, the smog of the party consuming him. He walked forward with the girl, his feet squishing with each step. He sat back down at the bar as she sat down beside him. She smiled at him once more and he smiled back.

"Have you ever been in that pool before?" he questioned the girl. She nodded.

"I was once, a long time ago. I lost something in there, but I don't seem to miss it."