

what the balloonsmith learned about love

By Sarah Duyvestan

i. breathe

clown-twisted animals, too-bright and pulled-taught over
pockets of protesting air
dogs with no faces, the chubby, child-finger stemmed
flowers that do not respond well to thorns
the squeal of
red-rubbed-against-green
and grasping oiled fingerprints that press too hard in their hunger.

a tubular canvas of unwilling potential
and evolved into
crafted and refined into
perversions of familiarity
meandering along
on summer's breath/breeze.
this underpaid, take-away, blow-away art
reimbursed in smiles
and laughter
(and the occasional tear
from wind-snatched ambush hands
or following sharp witted exchanges with pavement
and other pointed encounters.)

a man who
breathes the world in and its colours
and releases them into a capsule
of time and place and childhood/freedom
and is their keeper.

ii. meander.

a lone flower grows beside
the window in a boot. he exists
in rubbered solitude
for balloons do not play nice with
beaks or paws with claws
and mouths of needle teeth waiting
for mice and other misfortunates -
however they make for mostly quiet friends.

iii. expansion and intermittence

on a cool day in april
(the cruelest month, said eliot)
the balloonsmith fell in love.

iv. the declaration

he says
you can have my heart/soul/breath
if you want it
if she wanted it like he wanted to return to
the place
where his skin touched her skin
and not the rubber. and she lays
back in the soft warm dirt
tulips fanning outwards
and around her
in a glorious halo
like a fine-tuned carousel of sickly-sweet pinks
and the balloonist's heart swells
but does not burst.

v. an aside --

(this is a feeling to grasp tight in your palm
to squeeze until the memory of it
spills out between your fingers like stardust.)

don't let go of the string
she says.

vi. the encounter

to rewind, a girl with sea green eyes
and hair like stained-cedar furniture
like cornsilk; and skin just as soft
as all the other usual clichés
taken and rearranged like clay to form
the standard enchanting creature
of tender curves and bedsheet-rumpled female warmth -
did appeal the balloonsmith's expertise.
for a funeral, she said
and when he enquired with regret as to whose passing she explained
she was not an acquaintance but a florist

whose services did not extend
in that direction. nor for that matter
did his, however
the balloonist found himself saying
most agreeably
he would be happy to be of help,
and so their not-quite-love story began
but not with once upon a time.

vii. a kiss

a kiss;
 like the gentle gush of air
of a balloon-slipped-from fingers during exhale
 like blue-bumped-clumsily-against-violet
 like a pinprick to the head of inflated trepidation.

bright red mars white rubber
where her lips used to be.
and the balloon floats slowly upwards.

viii. a letter

to the young girl from the flower shop:

the balloonsmith regrets
with utmost earnest
his shortcomings in terms of that
which is not held by string
with all his to offer consisting of
 rubber poetry
and candlelight dinners
with synthetic flames
so as not to harm the rubber and
 rubber flowers upon arrival to match the
 rubber fingertips that are well versed in
manipulating rubber but are strangers to a stranger's skin.

~~yours sincerely~~
 ~~with love~~
~~yours truly~~
 yours

yours sincerely,
 the balloonsmith.

ix. romeus

now what of the tragedy that
the vibrant red balloon
 that is heart and lung in one
 that is his breath and hers combined
strays too close to the flame
of desire/attraction/darewesaylove.
 and heat leads to expansion
 and expansion leads to explosion
 and ignorance is no excuse for
murder, or scientific law. until
the jubilant release of a thousand red
heart-shaped balloons
 of atmosphere-magnetic helium
 of universe and stars
consumes us.

the magician of air-and-rubber
crumpled. the shredded remnants
sticky in his palm as the rainbow faded into
black and white and
shades of grey and dulling silver.
then sinking, pebbles-in-pocket
feeling. a kind of
virginia woolf-ophelia
of plastic
drifting melancholy upstream to the sounds of
haunting exit music for a film.
cello sick in grief
for another curtain brushing floor
in falling.

x. exeunt

on a day before the end
began, the trick
she tells him. is to keep breathing.

and with his breath
there is new life.