

Bright, Burning Fuse



Melanie Faith

Etched Press Poetry Series

Time Was

Once it was the kind of world
where a girl could travel around alone
along any road with a backpack,
a change of clothes, and a banjo.
Where thumbs up, she'd hop
into any passing truck, likely
a farmer or a fellow rover
like her brother.

A trucker, maybe hauling something
seasonal like wheat and barley,
golden apples or oats. She'd be sunny
as a meadow, wind-pink cheeks.
Time was, she'd lived on a commune;
time was, she'd grown for a year
whatever crops the passing driver
or his father or his grandfather
happened to be hauling along

the rural route. Her hair in braids,
maybe bell-bottom blue jeans,
patchwork caftan or button-down.
They'd share a smoke in the cab,
a provincial joke, and wasn't that the truth?
braking for kids on bikes and just about
nothing else but sunset and a diner
between that stop and the next.

He'd show her
Kodaks of a couple of grin-faced kids
tucked in a cracked leather wallet
as they order platters—
country fried chicken, mashed potatoes,
and corn the color of vast prairie lands.

January 28, 1986

Third grade
consisted of learning cursive,
big loopy letters tumbling
across the sky of our lined pages,
running fierce broken arcs
from the Big Oak to the monkey bars,
boys against girls against boys.
Our sneakers leaving the grassy ground
with each step a swirling streak of wind
burns our lungs' frantic beat against gravity.

How were we to know? After recess
that day, Mrs. G. stood before the screen,
smiling at the First Teacher in Space
smiling, boarding the blazing rocket ship.
How were we to know? The teacher
carrying reading, writing, and arithmetic—
so soon to plume into a broken puff,
an arc of smoke, tears from an otherwise sky.

Our generation's one small step for man,
one giant leap for mankind—
73 seconds in, a loop, curved and split
before our eyes— terror, ash
fallen flight, no hero's landing.

Our first indication
all the good intentions in the world
couldn't save Icarus' wings from melting.

Perfect Day

Outside your door at this instant, sprung tender and reckless, a pulse beat's zing, a rented machine, idling at the curb, keeps time guessing. There's too much wasted sunshine, too many excuses of why and why not. Why shouldn't we? April is the undoing of never, the holy fissure, cracking open to the green glimmer. Leave your grumpy, your grouchy, and your everyday papers with their headlines of mayhem. Torture is only one more second spent sedentary. Lickety needs its split. One more mile outside this town of manicured lawns, mini-vans spilling fast food soda cups they've slurped to the dregs. Come. Out into the vast blue beyond there's only interstate, a silken itch for speed. Footfall finding only pedal and torque's ready pull. Leave. Why spend another night lonely? Forget the robe, eating in, and another droning movie. There's you, me, a reckless wind, throttling 70.

You have read an excerpt from *Bright, Burning Fuse* an upcoming chapbook by Melanie Faith deals with the conflict of living a conventional life and wishing to run free. At moments, it aches for freedom, at others, it wishes to be confined, but through it all, it asks if there is a compromise. These poems are examinations of the results of cataclysmic and common events that inhibit and spark desires for our entire lives.

MELANIE FAITH holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte, NC (2007). She was featured reader in Wilson College's 2005 Visiting Writers Series and received the 2006 Outstanding Young Alumnae Award. Her poetry and landscape and architectural photography recently appeared in *The Binnacle* (University of Maine), *Emprise Review*, *Heavyglow*, *Six Little Things*, *Mo: Writings From The River* (Montana State University), and more. Her instructional article about creative writing critique groups is forthcoming from *The Writer* magazine (November 2009). Etched Press will publish her poetry chapbook, *Bright, Burning Fuse*, which was also a finalist in the 2008 Keyhole Magazine Chapbook contest, in December 2008. The opening poem from the collection (along with landscape photos taken by the author) is featured in the online literary magazine, *Shape of a Box* by Folded Word Press, <http://www.youtube.com/shapeofabox>. For more information, or to order a copy, contact the author at writer@pa.net. She lives and writes in rural Pennsylvania, where she educates young minds as an English, history, and SAT tutor at a college preparatory high school.