

## "Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

### **Slow Up** By Tara Hardy

If you've ever stood at the edge of a curb or a cliff wishing for the shove of a stranger. If you reached that edge after running and running around blocks and blocks and uncures of promises to heal the dread that is your unwavering companion. If you've crawled from that ledge into the very hand of God and he's thrown you back like an underweight fish, this is for you.

I have been 12, 26 and 34 standing on that ledge, wishing for the mercy of a stranger, wondering each morning at the miracle curse of breath and waking. The smell of an old man's cologne still stinging the insides of my nostril, it is a smell my nose reverts to, an odor tattoo. Sometimes in an elevator some is actually wearing it. Those are the days that the siren lure to release gets louder and louder still, making it impossible to answer the phone, dress my limbs stop mulling over methods. Nothing stops the unravel.

Nothing stops the pull of the thread of the hand sewn quilt that has for ten long years stood in for mother. Those are the days I wonder how many others run weepless in dreams from the invincible hands of their fathers. How many, tell me, how many wait for the side effects to ease from too many rounds in the ring with double-fisted psychotropic meds? Anti-anxieties, antidepressants, anti-Christmas wrapping over old scars meant to delude us into feeling more whole, less worried, well-adjusted, pleased.

I actually liked the third drug, the one with the beautiful name--it sounded slinky like a girl I should have been wooing instead of trying to crochet myself a mind girdle. It sneaks up on me mid-morning like a brand of marijuana, an old boyfriend called creeperweed, it sorts my thoughts and feelings into neat piles and burns the ladder like smoky leaves. If you've ever tried to smoke yourself out of the cage of your skull thrown torches through the windows and prayed for the rodents to flee, this is for you.

This is for you, on the ledge, on the bridge: slow up.

Listen. I don't know what it is that keeps my heart pushing blood into and out from the correct tunnels, I only know that its sweet crevice isn't through sheltering me. And I know that each time I swerved close enough to send sparks off the guardrail, something whispered in my ear, slow up. Slow up destiny, let yourself take on last look.

Sometimes it's been grass, its relentless watch over dead earth that has humbled me into staying. Other times, a pair of eyes generous for no blue reason. This last time it was a fig, a fig saved my miserable life. Have you ever seen one? Inside, they're amazing. So slow up.

Come stand with me away from the edge, away from the breeze that threatens to tumble you and me. Remind yourself the hands in dreams are just phantoms, the sirens their voices. Resist solutions made under duress. Under your dress keep a pen, draw your own image again and again, each time less grim, more holy, more ascendant to your destiny to spit in the face of the reaper. Enshrine yourself, cover a wall with your faces, linger before your own eyes that love you.

Slow up, resist, pull on grass, greet worms alive, marvel at their single-eyed glory of turning garbage in on itself, slow up, step back, help a stranger, share a fig.

