

### **Sarah Mook Poetry Contest 2017, Grades 6-8, First place, “Queendom”**

The first place poem in grades six through eight recollects a memory of being six years old, climbing a favorite apple tree, and surveying the surroundings with the attitude of a queen. Like many accomplished poems, this one is deceptively simple; yet it reveals a depth of understanding that indicates this author’s grasp of pacing, effective line breaks, original diction, and rhythm.

The first section of this four-section poem gives us the speaker’s age and specifics of running to, greeting, and climbing an apple tree. The matter-of-fact opening line, “I’m six,” immediately places the reader at a time of childhood where exploration is paramount. The speaker then gives the physical description of this six-year-old:

I run through the field  
bare feet pounding tall grass.  
My curls bounce  
in a cool autumn breeze  
and the faded fabric  
of my favorite dress  
swooshes against my legs.

I especially appreciate the slow pacing that these line breaks give in this opening section. The reader is swept along with these short lines where the breaks encompass one phrase that quickly leads into the next. The verbs “pounding,” “bounce,” and “swooshes” lend vividness to the action, and the alliteration in the repeated ‘f’ sounds of “field,” “feet,” “faded fabric,” and “favorite,” tie the action together.

The next two sections describe what happens when the speaker arrives at the apple tree. We see that she is in a rush because she “skid[s] to a stop in front of it [the tree]” and is not intimidated by its size as her eyes “travel up the sturdy trunk.” Next, “she clamber[s] up / grab[s] onto rough stumps / and place[s] a foot inside the hollowed-out hole.” She imagines that the hole is where the following occurs:

rodents and rabbits live  
protected and concealed  
by the dark shadow  
of my apple tree.

The tree’s beneficial nature of hiding and protecting living things, we suspect, applies to the speaker also. And, I like that this is the first mention of the type of tree—“my apple tree.”

The final fourth section, the longest, is again told in a controlled manner with short lines, each capturing a brief moment of description, action, or emotion. The speaker climbs to the top of the tree that branches into “three thick limbs,” and rests her back against “rough gray bark” where “sun beams down.” These phrases of three one-syllable words add a rhythmic sense to the poem.

Then, the poet creates a vivid image: sun “through the branches / create[s] patterns of lace / on my skin.” The last seven lines complete the sense of fulfillment and peace that this tree provides. Up in the tree, the speaker “feel[s] important / and large / and at peace.” The poem ends with a creative metaphor—her “perch” becomes a “throne” where she can “watch over / my tiny / queendom.” Empowerment is the benefit of sitting at the top of this tree so that what is below becomes a “tiny” province over which the speaker rules.

This engaging poem reminds the reader of command one realizes by admiring a tree and climbing it to the very top. We see this childhood (even adult) pleasure echoed in Robert Frost’s poem, “Birches,” and in A. E. Housman’s poem, “Loveliest of Trees.” Like those two respectful poems concerning trees, this one fully appreciates and gives power to the apple tree. Congratulations to a fine poet!

*Thank you for the pleasure of reading your work!*

Marie Kane  
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