

THE FOUR DEATHS OF MITCHELL FISH

By Luke Daly

I. OXYGEN

I slash in like a dull knife but don't tip into the abyss. Just wow at the Formica. Some wrongful oxygen rises up the ways in my neck. I do fall then

II. OXYGEN

Slick Mick pushed in through the screen door, stopped in the middle of my eat-in kitchen with the brand new formica countertops his finger in the air like he was gonna say something. Fell face first on the floor right where you're standing. If I'm telling the truth? I hoped he was dead. So I started sifting my hands like this through the bills and penny-savers on the formica, feeling for my cordless phone and hoping that if he was dead, I wouldn't find the phone quick enough to save him. And I saw him on Day One, charming as only a drunk can. Previous to the nightly urination in bed and being too far gone to wake up and clean it. Previous to driving my glossy black Oldsmobile into the Blue Earth River the day after I got it. Previous to stabbing his hand with a steak-knife trying to show off for Jenny at Ponderosa. That's why Ponderosa uses knives with rounded tips now: My man, Slick Mick. And here he was in my trailer, like a damned dead fish, oily from the car but no real work, just playing around with his nuts. Go on and lie there, you sick duck. I'll call you an ambulance just as soon as I find my cordless phone.

III. OXYGEN

Most screen doors swing out, but not Louise's camper's. It was mis-installed. In pushed Mick and let the screen door smack shut behind him then sneezed hard and long in what Louise saw as an improbably full arcing motion of the head, thereby depositing on the gold-flecked Formica kitchenette a shimmering pink meteoroid of what one inferred was deep neck, and the Formica's gold rose up from the counter to meander with the floating phosphenes of his visual input, the words of his mind spilling into a warm, red, bassy hum, each phoneme bereft of its little edge, scrubbed of freedom, a really satisfying sound like the moment at the movie theatres brought to us by Dolby, and Mick's body falls to the floor, a light jacket from a hanger, as Louise screamed and scrambled her hands through the bills and penny savers on the Formica with its golden flecks glinting like sun spangles of water in tomorrow's window's north light for the phone which was behind her on the wall, but that didn't matter at all, and she didn't know it yet. Goddamn, he thinks, that looks like gold.

IV. CARBON DIOXIDE

She was low breath on a spark. Say, she and I at a small party and I feel loose and jocular with the hosts because she's on my arm, though it isn't like I'm a star and she's in my gravity or on my gravity, and I feel fortunate, and I enjoy the experience of opening and being less shy, like a moon flower, or a primrose, which is medicinal in case you didn't know. Five years into our marriage, as I lay in bed staring at the dusty ceiling fan, I began sneaking off my fat gold ring to blow cool streams of oxygen on my finger where the ring lived. I guess it wasn't really oxygen anymore, but that's what I saw. And so the air also could have been pregnant with small flecks of gold and spearmint, each mote moon-bleached, the school of them swirling like dust in a river of air which would break over the birch log of my finger and resume leeward, filled with new potential from the journey through the eddies. How cool the water that took me then to my private hollow. Would I drink it? I was dying of thirst.

THE LAST TWO POEMS BY MITCHELL FISH

GENERA

I walked by you, through the galaxy of toys on the teal carpet, laid a cool palm on your head and thought—as a darkening yarmulke of thinking grew over me—oh to be a boy again, with father passing by wordless, just walking through, somewhere behind here.

TREATMENT

My doctor prescribed dog-sledding and zen koans, and when I asked her, Dear Doctor, Where does one, where will I go to procure these things in my current state, she said, Oh Dear Sir, if you burrow like an Irish rat into the neighbor's lilac bush, what will they say when you ask for a cup of flour?