

# The Poets on Parnassus Poetry

These poems were the winners of the 2005 Poets on Parnassus Poetry Competition, coordinated by Joan Baranow, PhD, and David Watts, MD, a member of the editorial board of *The Pharos*, and judged by Dr. Watts. The prize winners were:

First prize, Ellen LaFleche of Northhampton, Massachusetts, for her poem, "Snow White Faces Terminal Cancer."

Second prize, Tracy Koretsky

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## Snow White Faces Terminal Cancer

Snow White is going to die, again. Melanoma this time, the malignant curse of milk-white skin. Snow remembers the first time she died. She was only seventeen when the old peddler woman knocked on her door with an apple for sampling. The red blush of Cortland skin! Who could resist? But the worm, that trickster, lodged in Snow White's throat. Woman and apples—a dangerous combination. Eve could have told her that. Snow White remembers her own funeral. She could hear everything.

The sobs of the mourners. Her stepmother, that hypocrite, wailing through the eulogy, wringing her murderous hands. Snow White dreads having to die again. The first time was a Grimm-Brothers nightmare: all those years in that glass coffin. A living corpse. On display like a wax saint. And the prince who kissed her into wakefulness? He was no prize. More frog than prince, you want Snow's opinion. He was a royal failure at marriage. Verbally abusive, neglectful. And his fetish for comatose women—the fool was obsessed with Sleeping

of Berkeley, California, for "I've Come to Take Your Picture."

Third prize, Phyllis Klein of San Francisco, California, for her poem, "Why Things Happen."

Ellen LaFleche also won an honorable mention award for her poem "Rapunzel Recovers from a Stroke." It is not published here.

The submission deadline for the 2006 contest is June 21, 2006. The competition's first



Beauty from the next kingdom over. Snow hired a divorce lawyer after she caught her husband hacking through the brambles surrounding Sleeping Beauty's castle with a weed-whacker. Snow White got the castle, custody of the children, hefty alimony payments. Then she noticed the mole on her arm. The jagged border, the ring of blue surrounding it like an aura. Two weeks waiting for the biopsy results. And then the bad news. Metastasis. It happens, even in fairy tales. Back to the lawyer, this time to sign a living will. No feeding

tubes or breathing machines. No heroic measures. Snow wants a death with dignity. Comfort measures only. And Snow is going to be cremated. No fool prince to kiss her back to life. She's not taking any chances this time around. No open casket, no gawking mourners. A small, private service—her ex-husband, their three children and seven grandchildren, a few close friends. Grumpy, the last surviving dwarf. After the service, Snow's children will scatter her ashes in her garden, where she plans to rest happily ever after.

—The End—

Ellen LaFleche

Ellen LaFleche has worked as a journalist and women's health educator in western Massachusetts. She wrote a column on women's health for many years for the *Amherst Bulletin*, a weekly newspaper, and has taught courses in women's health issues for the residential college system at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. She currently runs her own editing business, specializing in academic writing. Her multimedia contemporary art baskets are on sale at the Blue Sky Gallery in Amherst, Massachusetts. Her poetry has appeared in *Writing The River* (Word Street Press). Her daughter Celine is a continuing source of inspiration for her writing. Her address is: 28 Clark Avenue, Northampton, Massachusetts 01060. E-mail: ELLaFleche@aol.com.

prize is \$500 and publication in *The Pharos*. There are no other cash prizes, but winners of second and third will also have their poems published in *The Pharos*. Details:

- Poems must have a medical subject and must not have been previously published.
- Submit poems that total a maximum of five pages, double-spaced, with *no name on the poems*. With the poems, include a 3-x-5 index card with your name, address, and phone

number (and optionally your e-mail address), and the titles of the poems. Enclose a check made out to "Poets on Parnassus" for \$7.50 for your entry fee.

- Contest directors are David Watts, MD, and Joan Baranow, PhD.
- Send your entry or entries to: Poets on Parnassus Prize, P.O. Box 1142, Mill Valley, California 94941. Questions may be directed to Dr. Watts at [hdwatts@earthlink.net](mailto:hdwatts@earthlink.net).

## I've Come to Take Your Picture

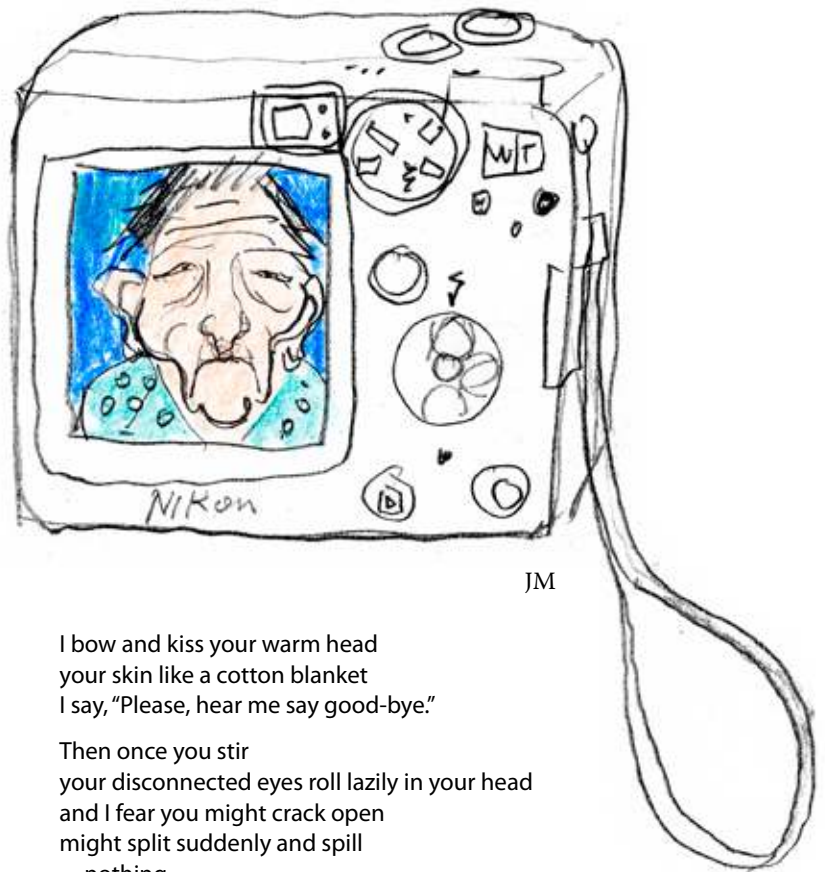
You in my camera—  
rodent-faced curled  
like a last bean in an emptied sack  
fist pressed to bloodless lips  
still black hair proud against hospital-white  
brow intent focused on sleep  
—or fighting it

Why have I carried this camera?  
Did I expect you to say "Moneeeeeee"  
freezing into your fullest grin  
then laugh like you hadn't done this  
all those many happy Sundays of my girlhood?

Did I expect to see you? I see  
that photo hung in your hall  
that tiny child me  
less than one month old

I try to focus on the differences  
My smile your frown  
my sprawl your curl  
—your yellow tubes

I almost believe  
you don't want to wake for me  
That you demand yellow liquid  
be dripped into your nose  
Because you think it regal  
Because you think it righteous  
not to eat or wake



I bow and kiss your warm head  
your skin like a cotton blanket  
I say, "Please, hear me say good-bye."

Then once you stir  
your disconnected eyes roll lazily in your head  
and I fear you might crack open  
might split suddenly and spill  
—nothing

"You are the only one who never left me,"  
I tell you, though I think you might not hear  
So I close over your tired ear  
whispering, "Grandma, be brave and die."

Tracy Koretsky

Tracy Koretsky is the author of *Ropeless* ([www.readropeless.com](http://www.readropeless.com)) a 14-time prize-winning novel which offers a fresh perspective on disability: acceptance, growth, and embracing the moment. The website features audio chapters and links to excerpts. Koretsky's poetry and fiction are widely published in national literary magazines and have won many awards including three Pushcart nominations. She says of her prize-winning entry, "No one told me what to expect. I thought my beloved grandma would greet me with a hug and a complaint that I was too skinny." Contact Ms. Koretsky through her web site, [www.readropeless.com](http://www.readropeless.com).

## Why things happen



The first thing: the girl whose father lost his leg at the knee became bitter as aspirin. Two rooms, two beds, one wall between, grief-soaked, uniting and separating them, the way wounding bonds or divides.

The second thing: your trip to the doctor's office, your blood in the microscope, how it clumps, how it stays alive for thirty minutes after popping out of your finger, while in the desert the blood of seven American soldiers and uncounted children, women, and men no longer lives in the dust and sand.

The third thing is the orchid in the living room. All the flowers lost their hold on the stems, falling out one by one or in clumps. The heat you needed was their chemotherapy.

The fourth thing: you didn't give up, didn't throw it out the window where it could have landed on a bird or scattered dirt and dead flowers over the courtyard, ground into car tires, spread too thin over the well-traveled highway.

*Phyllis Klein*

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Phyllis Klein is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Poetry Therapist with a private practice in San Francisco and Palo Alto. She writes poetry as a way to connect her inner and outer worlds, believing that poetry provides a deep empathic connection between the author and the reader, both self to self, and self to other. "Why Things Happen" is one of the innumerable stories written about human suffering and our attempts to transcend. The first stanza is fiction, meant as a tribute to the many people Phyllis has seen in her practice over the years, an endeavor to honor their grief. The rest is real experience. Her address is: 870 Market Street #944, San Francisco, California. E-mail: pkgold@earthlink.net.