As A Poet, as a man
by Kelly Mullins

As a man, I am fragile.
Flesh and blood and fear of not paying bills.
I need gas in the car when payday is still a week away, and food for my body.
I have breakable bones and a nine-to-five that inspires nothing but stress and doom – I sometimes fear dying having accomplished nothing.
I listen to the daily words that escape my throat and find no solace in them, wishing away each painful day silently in my skull, and they echo like a shrill gong.

As a poet, I am as fierce as a blazing dawn,
spreading fire across the horizon,
burning away the darkness.
I am the awe contained in dark thunderheads;
my lines are blinding bolts of raw energy:
threatening,
jagged and
beautiful.
The shapes of my words are etched patterns on the smooth surfaces of the mundane, illuminating the unseen until it is unavoidable.

You can feel my poecy in your gut and it tightens around your chest, making it impossible to breathe, but you wouldn't want to breathe for fear of somehow lessening intensity.
I am a god of a universe imagined, immortal and unknowable.

As a man, I am awkward and shy.
My human words bounce around, sometimes clever, sometimes witty, but usually, just… like words people hear.
As a man I stand always on the edges looking in, wondering what life must be like for everyone else, what place would I have among them, why can't they see me? Why can't they hear my words? Why can't I hear my words. Why can't I speak my words?
Because I am just a man.

As a poet, I am the epitome of passion.
I am the glistening sweat beads on the flesh of lovers.
I am the hot breath of long sighs released through lips when held breaths demand escape.
I can conjure you and brush your cheek gently with my fingertips, trace your ear, run my fingers down your neck to your collarbone, embracing carnal craving, draw gentle swirls around your shoulder, painting portraits of desire, tickling the edges of your underarm before tracing the roundness of your breast in concentric circles growing smaller until I join my hands with lips and teeth and tongue and as a poet I know just the places to kiss, to nibble… and bite until goosebumps form on your belly, which my soft touch traces down, down to your

navel, circling your belly button for just a bit too long, biting, kissing, then down – you bite your lip through sweaty panic and anticipation – down a bit more until my hot breath touches you – you wiggle, pressing your fingernails against my scalp resisting the urge to threaten me – I move closer and…

As a man, I am a bumbling idiot.
My insecurities shroud my visage with blandness and sadness, never giving me permission to speak anything but pleasantries to her.
I, um, I can sometimes stammer and say really dumb things, like "Wanna see me put a cigarette out on my tongue?"
I run face first into a wall of ego, one of the walls that line my prison, blocking me from the sunlight of free verse.

But as a poet, I am the apex confidence.
I am a warrior poet: brandishing tempered steel words, keen edged with even the spaces between them forged with meaning. I slay my enemies effortlessly. I dance the blade with grace and skill; demand respect with iron gaze, calm intent, steady hands and well-placed stance.
I turn a phrase over to reveal the soft underbelly.
I ride in with dawn and race the sun to the opposite horizon.
I wake giants with laughter. I rush the hordes, the dogs of war, the frenzied mobs and mow them down with sharpened verse and stand atop the field of battle bellowing my war cry, I summon the gods of war to bow before my stanzas.

But as a man, I am unsure.
I have far fewer answers than questions.
Where do I fit? Who am I? Who am I today? How did I get here? What if I forget my lines?
What if I cannot write anymore?
I worry about you, about me… about us.
What if I don't wake up tomorrow?
What if I do?

As a poet, I am the Universe.
Rumi speaks the thousand words for love through my throat. Virgil and Dante quietly guide me through the darkness of my imagination.

As a man, I am minute.
A speck, barely noticeable walking down a busy street.

As a poet, I am a prophet.
I see meaning in everything, never definition.

As a man, I am a realist.
Everything must be explained.

As a poet, I am immortal.
As a man, I am frail, temporal.
As a poet, I am infinite.
As a man infinitely limited.
As a poet, lovable.
As a man, fallible.
A poet, enlightened.
A man, depressed.
A poet, free.
A man…
As a simple man…
… … .. . .
As nothing more than just a man, I am a poet.