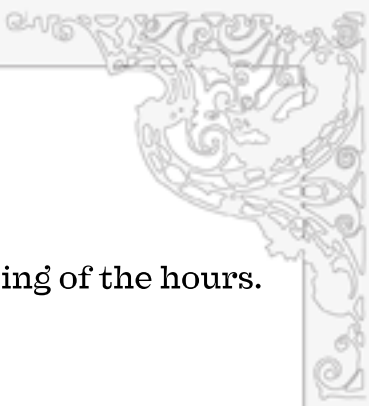




A SLEEPWALKING PRINCESS

In this room sleeps a princess who
is always watched, all eyes are upon her.
She is dressed each morning,
she is fiercely corseted,
encased in dresses that feel like coffins.
She is fed milk and honey.
She learns singing and calligraphy,
Alchemy and French,
just in case the day comes
when she might be queen.
She plays with dolls
and dresses her pet dog in frilly dresses
just in case the day comes
when she might become a charming plaything.
Nobody really knows
but all eyes are on her
just in case.
Dukes and Marchionesses
hold her hand that she may not fall
and they never let go.


1.



The days are filled with the passing of the hours.
The hours pass, unchanging.
The air in the palace is solid
with ceremony and expectation.
Her governess sits by her bed at night
reading fairy tales to the sleeping princess.
One day your prince will come.
One day you will wear a dress rarer than rubies.
One day you will go to the ball.
But every night there's a violet hour
when the governess sleeps
and the princess sleepwalks.
In the morning, her bed is disordered,
her feet are dirty.
The palace is in despair.
Something must be done.
The royal carpenters are called.
They pile mattresses on the princess's bed
until it's so high
it nearly reaches the ceiling

2.





and they build a chair for the watching governess
that is tall and spindly
so that she may read and watch
the sleeping princess.

She won't get away now.

But in the morning

when the princess is woken up
for her breakfast of milk and honey
her hair hangs wild,
there are leaves on her nightdress,
mosses and lichens are strewn on the bed,
her feet are dirty and raw
as if from dancing in the woods all night
without permission.

And that hair on the pillow

Does it come from a wolf?

Mercedes Kemp 2009