

by Shaila Merchant

My Descent to the Underworld

Twas one night at a quarter past three
When I decided to dive beneath the sea
The water was so calm, shimmering in the moonlight
That I could not resist its beckoning call, as I tried with all my might.

Slowly I entered into the chilling cold depths
And soon I found that I was immersed up to the neck
I felt the pressure of the water oppose the elastic recoil of my chest
And knew that this decreased my FRC up to 50% at best.

And everything increased from here on in
From inspiratory muscle work to pressure around my abdomen and limbs
I felt the increase in venous return to my heart and right atrial pressure
Which increased pulmonary recruitment and distension, what a gesture!

As I descended lower and lower
I realized to my embarrassment that immersion diuresis had taken over!
The horror, the horror!
But still I descended...

And then I felt the pain in my ear
And the use of the Valsalva maneuver seemed so very clear
I plugged my nose and pushed with all my might
To equalize the pressures in my ear in the middle of the night

I had now descended about fifty meters in to the deep blue sea
And was suddenly overcome by euphoric sensations
Alas, it was the raptures of the deep!!

Yet still I descended, how foolish was I
When slowly I became confused, disoriented, and felt I was going to die
I had become the victim of nitrogen narcosis
And knew that the outward recoil of my chest wall was now comparable to someone with scoliosis.

I had to ascend, and quickly at that
Or my gas-filled cavities would inevitably go SPLAT!!

Remembering the knowledge from physiology long ago
I knew that the ascent would have to be slow
The fear of the "bends" and the "chokes" was too great
And I knew that tomorrow I was going on a date.

So slowly I ascended leaving the underworld behind
A step-wise ascent seemed to be the best at the time

And at last I made it to the top, back to my world
Vowing to never again enter water so deep and so cold

So every time I get the urge to dive into the deep
I tell myself I'm not Pipin Ferreras or a sperm whale and I go back to sleep!!