

I love to climb

by Colin Pritchard

We climbed our favourite tree,
I to the topmost branches,
she stretched on a bough, tangled red hair,
dangling a gangly leg.
“What will you be when you grow up?”
“I’d love to climb . . .”

We bought a rope, met up in Mersey Square,
bussed out to Stanage, Froggatt, Eyam,
honing our climbing skills, forging a bond . . .

until one day, she climbed, I could not follow,
and so our paths diverged –
I to the greater ranges, she to the big rock walls . . .

I saw her still – in climbing magazines,
fragile frame forging bold new routes –
I even kept the cuttings for a while.

One day her son emailed “she asks for you” –
and so I travelled halfway round the world,
arrived too late for words.
I took her hand: rough-skinned, strong-sinewed fingers still –
eyes said “I knew you’d come . . .”

Later I sat as she slipped down her final slope
and, tousling that red hair, I gently cut the rope.