

The Sun Goes Down on Summer

by Steve Lawhead

I come to the water one last time as the sun goes down on summer.
It's going; I can feel it slip away, and it leaves a cold, empty spot.
A hole in my warm memories of endless golden days and dreams as ripe as watermelons.
I'd give the world to make the summer stay.

The water is calm around me.
It's a warm, silent sea of thought dyed in the rich blues of night and memory.
Why can't things just stay the way they are?
Instead, the days rush headlong into change and I feel like nothing's ever going to be the same.

Soon school will start again. And all the things I thought I'd left behind will come back, and it won't be gentle water I'll be swimming in---
It'll be noise and people and schedules and passes and teachers telling everyone what to do.
One more year of homework, tests and grades. Of daily popularity contests and pressure-cooker competition and heaps of frustration.

The first day is the worst. Not knowing who your friends are, or what's changed since last year. Trying to pick it up where you left off.
I'll look real hard for a last-year's friend to get me from one scrambled class to another, through halls crawling with people.

I wonder if I'll fit in.

Football practice started last week. It started without me.
I had to make a choice and football lost.
Two years on the team and it struck me---who am I doing this for?
It's just another thing people expect you to do, so you do it.
School is full of those kinds of things---things that sap your freedom, and keep you from being yourself.
That's what I want most, to be myself. But that's hard.

Here's what I dread most: when summer goes, I go with it.
I go back to school and I change as soon as I walk through those doors.
I have to be someone everyone will like---that's a law of survival.

What would happen if I just stayed the real me? Would they turn me off?
Label me "weird"?
Would I ever get another date?
It seems like so much to risk.
But growing is a risk. Change is a risk.

And who knows. I might discover something of myself in the coming year.
I might get closer to the person I am---what a discovery that would be!

When the doors open on Monday morning, I'll have a fresh start, a fresh opportunity to find myself.
I want to be ready.