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# A Mathematician's Villanelle

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Poem: A Mathematician's Villanelle

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# A Mathematician's Villanelle

GIZEM KARAALI

When first did I learn to cherish the bittersweet taste of mathematics?  
Mental torture, subtle joy, doubt and wonder, me in meaning  
Must have come later, after the games, the limericks, the lyrics.

Strange ceremonies awaited me, mystical hymns, magic tricks,  
After the first gulp of water, the first bite, the first bloodletting.  
When first did I learn to cherish the bittersweet taste of mathematics?

See the little girl, easily bored, not up for much brain gymnastics.  
But words streamed, letters flew by, in full color my spring  
Must have come later, after the games, the limericks, the lyrics.

Euclid rises on stage, other ancients follow, a lock clicks.  
Number rivers join letters, friends turned lovers, a promise ring.  
When first did I learn to cherish the bittersweet taste of mathematics?

You were there, my beginning, my middle, my end, my memories mix,  
That time was finite, your wisdom old, my eyes weak, my mind a nestling  
Must have come later, after the games, the limericks, the lyrics.

You held my hand, taught me to play, build with new bricks.  
Then I was alone, except now with a group, a field, and a ring.  
When first did I learn to cherish the bittersweet taste of mathematics?  
Must have come later, after the games, the limericks, the lyrics.



*Gizem Karaali is an associate professor of mathematics at Pomona College. She finds the concept of mathematical poetry intriguing and regularly organizes poetry readings at math meetings.*

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