

PEMDAS

by Trevor Huxham

Purple Elephants Must Die At Sunrise.
No, no, no, that's not how it goes at all.
Parentheses! Exponents! Multiply! Divide! Add! Subtract!
That's the Order of Operations we learned
In the pre-algebraic days of seventh grade.

To help us remember this etiquette of numbers,
Our teacher uncovered an acronym on the whiteboard:
PEMDAS—almost Latinate in its balanced clusters,
It delicately reigned over our pencil-only problems,
Whispering the legislated protocols with an unvoiced stop and sibilant.

As if this acronym were too hard to remember,
Or too dully graceful,
We went further down the loanword alphabet from A to M
And chose ourselves a mnemonic.
And this is how that bit of flash fiction went:

At sunset grazed some elephants
That, to their disadvantage, didn't wear gray skins
But preternaturally purple ones.
By dusk, they received their sentence: death.
No context; no crime given; no trial held.
They mourned all night, trumpeting in bewilderment.

A quarter past eight, the bell tolled.
Purple elephants,
Holding each other's tail in their trunks,
Solemnly trudged to their deaths.
They wept over the inexorable law
Which both the elephants
And our seventh grade homework
Were subject to.