

POETRY

Firedrake

Colonization of the gastrointestinal tract with ... methanogens significantly affects host metabolism. ... The presence of ... methane ... on breath testing is associated with increased BMI and percent body fat.¹

Near midnight they brought him in,
a big man in green tights,
a cape of purple scales
enfolding his body like wings,
clawed boots now by his side.

With blistered lips, reddened face,
he looked up at me from a stretcher.
"I'm Dragon Man at the circus," he said,
"can light my breath with a match,
exhale a flame. No alcohol trick this!"

"Just minor burns of the lips.
Lucky your mouth was spared.
So how'd you learn
to be a firedrake?"

He laughed a deep chuckle.
"In junior high, we'd lay fire farts
in the men's room. All us fatsos could,
but not the skinny kids.
Then, one day, lighting up a smoke,
a flash!"

Perplexed, I signed him out
with prohibitions, precautions.
He'd told me the diagnosis,
yet, unknowing, I was deaf at the time.

Now, I wonder —
a fat man from a rural town,
water drawn from local wells,
methane on his breath:
a saboteur in his gut?

Richard Bronson MD

Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology
and Reproductive Medicine
Stony Brook University Medical Center
Stony Brook, NY

Reference

1. Mathur R, Amichai M, Chua KS, et al. Methane and hydrogen positivity on breath test is associated with greater body mass index and body fat. *J Clin Endocrinol Metab* 2013;98:E698-702.

CMAJ 2013. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.131122



© 2013 Thinkstock