

POETRY

fourteen pieces

toxins and tar

Erin McMahan

comfortable underneath the blanket of stars
crisp air, creating a tightness in the grave of my lungs
a blackness buried
deep inside our ignorance
what goes in must come out
except for what gets caught killing us.

stains of our mistakes
imprinted on our lifetime
yet, I continue to exhale.

as the cold seems to freeze
the smoke released from my lips,
I become numb as I watch
the smoke disappear with the wind,
if only I could keep it -
it might kill me faster.

-emc

PERSEPHONE

Alex Nguyen

I will meet him when I have swallowed hurt and drunk sorrow
he will bow to me gape-mouthed, swallowing stars
within the breadth of a universe

he will remember every visible silence,
his warm arms like tethers, like silken rope
cradling infinitum, within an hourglass

I will watch, and he will press plush-lipped kisses to stone,
cold-capped peaks and scarlet forests aching on his tongue
I have forgotten everything I have ever known

I have lived like blacksmiths and crafts of wonder
and broken mountains with the shale of my skin
as birds, we will fly with tempests on our horizons, chasing sunsets

and he is *beastly*—

GULP GULP

Sandy (SeoYoon) Song

chapped lips—
where is the water?
wa•ter | wó-tər
my throat is dry from not
having set foot on motherland soil for
how many years?
I stopped counting.
cracked
my teeth clatter
in halted construction of
language(s)
reformation of my alphabet memories
I AM THIRSTY
there are crevices in my tongue
umma umma umma umma umma¹
flipped into iambic pentameter
mama mama mama mama mama
I cannot break
and spit out a word sometimes:
sediments of *hangeul*² fall asleep
more often than my feet
shove a finger in my throat to puke
but my pinky isn't long enough
where is the quench?

1 엄마 | Umma: (informal) mama in Korean

2 한글 | Hangeul: the Korean Alphabet

SHE SAID TO ARABELLA

Isabella Sofio

She said to Arabella -
We live in houses more like boxes,
and on a part of this marble in which
it is more likely to see a painted house that is blue
than pink. Polka-dots and cherries on our dresses and skirts, cigarettes in between
our painted chapped lips, and lace everywhere but our shoes. A collection of
words spoken to me:
you're beautiful, thanks for the virginity cunt, i will marry you if i haven't found
someone else by 30.

A collection of moments that happened to me and that happened before me allow me
to see beauty more than anything else:

I let you say my full name, but only certain people should be allowed to
voice something so intimate.

I lived in a brick house, I lived in a tan house, I lived in a building made of
orange rock.

I had a dream once that I never left home.

In that dream every day felt like a week, every hour felt like a month, every
minute felt like a year, every second felt like the number 21.

The windows of
the orange rock
building were frames
of wavering black
lines. But, you were a
chipped white painted
window, and the only
way out.

We mimic the rain
outside tears crawl
from our eyes and roll
down our cheek hills.

Wishes grow out of
the ground in the form
of weeds outside my
bedroom window.

A vase painted the
color of the Carolina
skies
sits on that dark
stained
wooden table next to
the
open window on the
spring day.

Little daisies dance
across the vase, a
pond of
shattered pieces
tangled in
lace.

What it's like to be a vase inside the stone house almost at the corner. What's it
like to be a vase placed in a box. What's it like to be a blue vase used for white roses
painted over to be pink to be used as an ash tray.

LET ME LICK YOUR PALMS

Lisl Fauke

cactus cries chrysanthemums—mums the word like a slit wrist
bliss or cherry covered lips
a trundle bed of petals to pull up over the nose, a jugular
exposed just an opening to crack
blanket tugged symphonies reach around the corner and
yank back
diazepam to dull the sentience she drifts down
crooked
like a deer trapped in his headlights.

EVAPORATE

Lisl Fauke

daylight distracts

present

my absence dark reminds of your absence

 crumpled sheets

 damp cheeks

scar tissue now opaque

 lights go on

 everything is still in the same place

 looks different

1. DEPARTURE

Selena Wellington

I'm supposed to write a poem right now
(Then I will tear it apart).
I stutter because I want to make it impersonal,
but this manila folder on my desk keeps staring at me.
I'd like to pretend it means something,
That in going this far I have become trans enough.
(How will I substitute this?)
But maybe this journey
(towards, away - the prefix trans doesn't actually specify direction)
is just an ongoing argument for external validation.
I know it doesn't have to be that way.

In this poem, I have used the word "I"
ten times.
Tell me this isn't self-absorbed.
Tell me everyone is on a journey of becoming
and no one is done transitioning.
Tell me we just talk more about our journeys because they can often be more
visible.
Tell me my trans is in the right direction.
Tell me it's not all in my head.
Tell me
Tell . me
Tell m . .e.

Right.
The letter in the folder uses my birth name.
(I could make some "deal" out of this, but it is my professional name after
all).
The letter never once messes up a pronoun.
It uses words like:
"strongly and persistently"
"desire to be less feminine"
"a 21-year-old biological female"
"androgynous identity"
"significant mind/body conflict"
"genderqueer, nonbinary, demiboy"

(I wish they'd used an "i" for "boy")
"gender neutral pronouns"
"masculine attitudes"
"significant reduction of personal distress"
"persistent gender nonconforming identification"
"goals for transition"
"presents as nonbinary in areas of school, work, and social circles"
"not fully disclosed their gender identity or goals for transition with their
parents"
"align their physical appearance with their psychological identity"
"increase the likelihood of being gendered as more masculine or androgynous"
"criteria for Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Adults, (DSM-5 302.85)"
"insight and judgement are within normal range"
"psychologically sound decision making capacity"
"has met all the criteria outlined in the official World Professional Association

for Transgender Health (WPATH) *Standards of Care v7* for treatment of individuals
diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria"
"psychologically ready to proceed with hormone therapy"

If this was a queer theory class,
we would discuss how
identity is unstable,
reaching for meaning pushes it further away,
longing for a sense of self destroys the sense of self,
(long)ing for . a. sense of
.. se . l . f.
d / e / st / / ro / / ys
///
the (sense) of
[self]
we must allow room for contradictions.

Perhaps my contradiction
is the numbness of reading this letter
and the urgency with which I will deliver it.

2. THRESHOLD

Selena Wellington

It's in my throat,
an itch,
like I have to keep clearing it
or keep drinking water,
a weight
like everything yet unsaid
is collecting there,
preparing the cords for song.

I return to the railroad tracks because I thought I would meet someone
there.
Brown hair swinging in the wind,
blue dress and bare feet
waving at me.
She wasn't there though.
I think I left her on a vision quest
sitting in the woods with twigs in her Earth-tangled hair,
reflecting jungles in her eyes,
crouching by the river, sharpening a knife.
She flits out like candle flame if you look too closely at her.

Instead I stare into the eyes of Pan
stalking the crest of a hill,
an impish grin on his face,
asking me why I summoned him.
I dance,
jumping around and through him
all chaos and flow
pinning him to the ground
panting as his laugh shakes the Earth beneath me.
His smile tastes like a secret he will never tell you.

My voice cracks
and the world pries in
to open me wide.
I am Ritual
enacted.

I don't know who I'll be tomorrow.

3. RETURN

Selena Wellington

If I could,
I would stop writing
poetry about being
trans enough.

I would accept
the changing
fluid motions
of understanding
and identities.

I would surrender
to Mystery between
my atoms,
rejoice in the unknowing
as a way of becoming
again and again.

If I could,
I would accept
this body
as is,
as grows,
without injecting
my shapeshifting
into its biology.

(Sometimes, even,
I do accept Her.
It is only by outside,
the others looking on,
that I fear I will
never be seen in
entirety.)

I am not substituting this journey.
I am not forsaking my past.
I am not letting go of my feminine.
I am reverently listening to all parts of me.

I am making room for my contradictions.

HIJA DE LA LUNA (DAUGHTER OF THE MOON)

Diana Bustamante-Aguilar

Diana Laura.

Dianita.

Mi Indita.

Diana.

Diana. [english pronunciation]

My name no longer mine,
Taken away and,
Doused with peroxide

Chemicals that burn
travel through my nostrils and blaze the inside of my eyes.

My sense of sight gone.

Sterilized.
All traces of my Mexican-ness taken away.

Raising my hand in class to answer the question posed by my teacher...

"Diana"
English.

"Diana"
Assimilated.

"Diana"
Oxidized.

Dianaaaa
Sitting on my bed in my Quinceanera colored-glossy-purple room
Dianaaa
Coming from the crack under my sandy not so white, white, door

I'm caught in an in-between
An
Almost there but not quite yet..
A
Constant tugging at my tongue.
Splitting of my brain.
Covering of my skin.
The...
Hesitation between introducing myself as Diana or "Diana"

D-I-A-N-A not Diana.

Diana.
 Aquella de naturaleza divina.

Diana
 Mi nombre. Significa. Fortaleza.

Diana
 La gota de sudor que cai de la cara de mi padre.
 El hinchamiento de las piernas de mi madre.

Diana
 Nombre de Guerrera.
 Mujer fuerte.

Diana
 El diptongo fluye como agua viva
 Agua, que revitaliza mis labios
 Que satisface el desierto dentro de mi pecho

Diana
 The brown golden caramel-sun-loved skin
 The crow black hair
 Dark eyes concentrated with my India blood
 Nombre que me ama y me abraza
 Name that celebrates my cafe con leche skin

Diana, Diana, Diana.
Diana, hija de la luna.

DOCUMENTED MEMOIR, UNOPENED LETTER

Estefania Lemus

She knew she was intoxicating herself.

Let the stars fall, every single one.

The veins of her heart snapped like whips.

Let their sparks rain on the world, and smother the ground.

Fate scribed her existence into the stars, there was nothing to be done.

Let the brightest blues and brilliant reds lose their pigment and fade to white.

Anguish and Sorrow grew hand in hand, a red string connecting the two.

Let the ocean pour over cities and mountains, let them drown.

Don't confuse longevity with supposed to be.

Let the darkness of an endless chasm spread through the void of every human heart.

She picks her poison, over and over and over

Let anguish and agony pollute the entire earth.

Splayed across the cobblestones, her bones mold into the concrete like clay.

Sigh.

She holds her breath.

Let it go.

anxious thoughts
Kelsey Livingston

1. Playing *tennis* on a hot day
2. and your teammate doesn't show up
3. The sunscreen smells like sunburns and aloe
4. Alone in the city
5. In a crowd of people
6. The chocolate melted in my pocket
7. A new school
8. No directions
9. No directions
10. Change the location
11. So so lost
12. *It's not so difficult*
13. New friends
14. Don't force it
15. *We've met before*
16. Not you
17. Not you
18. *Are you vegetarian?*
19. 500 unread emails
20. Can't say no
21. My thoughts have been corrupted by
22. you
23. and you
24. *Listen*
25. Three in the morning
26. and I'm up
27. and the crickets
28. okay now I'm awake
29. A new city
30. *Go alone*
31. Dependency
32. Twenty-five pages of reading
33. *Goodnight!*
34. I've been alone this whole time
35. Lipstick
36. Stop staring
37. He stopped thinking I was important
38. Nails on a chalkboard
39. *Are you a vegetarian?*
40. Frisbee
41. Volleyball
42. Pick a sport I have a bad history with
43. Deep questions

44. because there's a difference between prying and caring
45. OK you're yelling
46. So so lost
47. No directions
48. Siri I didn't ask you
49. *I want advice*
50. *but I'm not going to listen*
- 51-60. *The plan's changed and I want you to make sure that you're present no matter how inconvenient it just became for you.*
61. Horror movies
62. Baths in hotel rooms
63. Running late
64. I'm not in control
65. Airport security
66. so many feet
67. so many people without socks
68. Budgeting
69. Four tests in one week
70. finals week
71. Waiting
72. *What do you want to do with your life?*
73. Rent
74. e-y not i-e
75. You look like _____
76. *She was just really stressed*
77. Don't ask me about my life
78. Don't ask me how I'm doing
79. Alone in the city
80. In a crowd of people
81. *Please don't hit on me*
82. I can hear the yelling from outside
83. Migraines
84. Nausea
85. Why am I nervous?
86. Why am I crying?
87. Do you even know me?
88. Cigarettes
89. Hate spirals
90. Change
91. Too much change
92. Too little change
93. Confrontation
94. Headaches
95. Vomiting
96. I don't know what you want
97. *You're nice*
98. *You look tired*
99. I am tired

don't worry, chicken curry

Drew Searchinger

Guria
queen of prank calls to her many suitors
red saris, pink nail polish
seeded ganja, spitting bitters
the same 7 bollywood tunes from her '09 motorola
avocado hair oil

aap khush hai, me bhi khush hoon

you're happy; I'm happy

we sit rich in mud
earth so fertile you are denser for its touch
she toys
traps it under a basket
it is anxious; even a brain of such unfortunate size
must smell the curry
feel spices in its breast

lets it go again

she rips its head clean off
once left, twice right-

pops like a pez dispenser

five water buffaloes watch from their corners
tethered to slats in fence
they eat only grass, partake little in death
the baby has the widest eyes
sees juice dribble down our chins
as red sun sinks, as city fills with blue smoke and car horns
we chew our cud together

not so hard

it's not so hard to

not so hard

snap a

bone

THE HAIBUN OF EVERYTHING

Jacks Curtiss

**IN THE BEGINNING
THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS LIGHT
JUST SMOKE SWIRLING ASH**

I don't live here. Not with you, in your funhouse mirror world. I refuse to look at my warped body, I know there's nothing there. The windows of your ship show you seas of green: I see the mirage of truth as we stand in a sandstorm. Look hard enough and you can see yourself through the looking glass, staring back with trichromatic pixels. Your friends are waiting on the other side; all you have to do is leap across the chasm (careful not to fall).

But that's not me. The pilot died yesterday and gave those silver wings to a boy who would never grow up to fly. He just said, "Do your best." Yet every day graves fill up until the ship is floating in the thoughts of the dead—their screams echoing orders, calling out commands, trying to steer with their bones. My hips would make a great helm.

Don't try to tell me that I'm me, because I know I'm not. I'm nothing but ash. The byproduct of countless millennia of fire, burning deep in the void—embers which wither in my veins. The pieces are always changing, though the players stay the same. Except for me. I'm already gone. Got two feet in the grave and by the time I'm done, I will have become the poison rain. Slick glistening skin, grayscale painting. They pile the pollution and burn my bones.

Look into the mirror and you can see your own soul. Sitting somewhere behind those porcelain eyes are pits of darkness. A void knows nothing but to be filled. We are all null. But for the briefest moment, (the time it takes a feather to fall an atom's width) two voids become one. I am one—whole. Just because we are devoid—empty does not mean we are nothing.

Sublime days follow melancholy nights, preceding lazy afternoons and sleepless springs. Waking up to silent sunlight burning cannibals into my DNA. I feel the softest skin, a touch of nothing, engulfing one void in another. Dead but yet full of life.

**ASHES FALL FROM VOIDS
SMOKE BILLOWS, AS BLACKENED DAWN
MAKES THE WORLD ANEW**