

Excerpt from Julian Daley's
Chapbook Russian Roulette

Ars Poetica

*A poem begins as a lump in the
throat, a sense of wrong, a
homesickness, a lovesickness.*

Robert Frost

A trip to the airport, the bus station.
Birds cry, flying sideways and
backwards. Puppets led by bellowing
wind, put on a show.

A trip to the airport, the bus station.
Squirrels run, burying acorns and
forgetting them. Scurrying through
Central Park, tripping over tails.

A trip to the airport, the bus station.
Toddlers play, dodging Volkswagens
in the street. Speeding pass their parents,
feigning invincibility.

A trip to the airport, the bus station.
I wish, guzzling gallons of water
to stop the hunger. Pretending I have
control over you not being here. Do I
have a say?

A trip to the airport, the bus station.
Without you, stoplights stay on red,
stop signs are green hexagons.
I just write it.

*The pain of love is the pain of
being alive. It is a perpetual
wound.*

Maureen Duffy

Song of Us

*Loafe with me on the grass,
loose the stop from your throat.*
Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

When I can no longer make metaphors
out of the mundane, cling to me like
debris from broken cookies in the
bottom of a milk cup; hold me like
oatmeal sticking to my spoon,
my ribs, the creases of my bowl.

When I have dreams that stir me to steal
all the bedsheets, settle beside me like
honey swirling in the tea brushing pass
my lips at the dewdrop dawn; hold me
like rain dripping off the bodega
awnings, sloppy and in rhythm.

When I practice swigging moscato like
hand grenades, settle beside me like
thunder patiently waiting until
I give my lightning cue; hold me like
your fingers on the keys, coming home
after work and class and that one drink
at the bar.

When I run out of nail polish remover in
the middle of the third nail, cling to me
like the stretchy elastic on the waistband
of sweatpants; hold me like your fingers

on the strings, lacing up to go to the
gym or park or basketball court.

When I feel unsure, loafe with me on the
grass. Loose the stop from your throat.
And I'll promiseteto do the same.

The Autobiography of My Mother's Love

I.

In late winter of 1994,
the first sacrifice my mother made
for me was when she said no
to the doctors who asked if
she wanted to end
the fetus forming in her uterus.
Because 38 was too old and
she already had enough
children.

I was born on a Thursday
evening in October. My mother
alone in Bronx Lebanon Hospital.
No one there to hold her legs or
tell her to p u sh.
No one as they carved her
a jack o lantern and pulled me out.

II.

And yet, I was ashamed of her.

When she
asked me to spell words she
should've learned by now. Are there two
p's
in appointment and how about
onion?

When she
nodded softly and whispered to avoid
showing the spaces in her mouth,
more gums than
enamel.

When she
had to repeat herself over
and over again because
her accent was
as thick as her hips.

Titanic

They say you never forget your first:
Soft kisses floating like icebergs,
double edged sharp sinking ships.
Don't forget the life vests.

Soft kisses floating like icebergs.
Leaving you at the door, convincing
you to forget the life vests with
Hershey Kisses knees against lava tiles.

Leaving you at the door,
swimming in the cologne stained air.
Falling to wobbly knees,
you claim his as your new adventure.

Cruising around the cologne stained air,
you dance in his oversized t-shirt,
a souvenir from this adventure which
was nothing like tag during recess.

You cry in his oversized sweatshirt,
remembering him, they never tell you
is nothing like playing tag.
It's razor lips sinking your battleship.

Exponent

I.

I am my mother's youth escaped
from Jamaican huts on the mountain.

I am her willingness. Offering herself
without promise of more, diamonds.

I am her hair, spongy and black, a
familiar style. I am her cheeks, soaked

with silent tears, cushioned. I am her
cane, her back arched, aching, running

after children that are not her own.

II.

I am my mother's scars, carved like a
gourd, her life expandable. Nurturing

five sons and two daughters. I am her
second chance, final moment to get it

right. I am her expectations handed
down, pearl necklaces and gold hoop

earrings. I am her moon, channeling the
waves, lulling the storm. I am

my mother's attitude, eye rolls and teeth
pinching air thin. I am her crooked

smile, whimsical, breaking any minute.

III.

I am my mother's accent stacked on
shelves, tumbling when I open the door.

Her snores ricocheting, switching
between wheezes and rumbles. I am

her voice heavy with vowels, hitting and
hugging me in the same breath.

I am her sorrow, buried in baby shower
RSVPs. Setting my pace, saying more

than that Bronx apartment. I am her
expectations whispered in a callus rasp,

"I love you"

Deep Conditioning

I'm conditioned to disregard love waiting for the backhand

of a compliment. Saying thank you when I'm listening for the laugh track.

Saying thanks when I'm wondering if you're blind. Feigning flattery when I

really should mean allow me to see myself through your eyes for a second.

I'm conditioned to disregard love so when he texts me "Hey" at 11 tonight, I

won't reply. Because "Hey" leads to things that I'm not ready for.

Backflipping off the diving board into an inflatable kiddie pool. But I should

be grateful so allow me to undress without muting the lights, wincing

at his arctic hands, hungry mouth devouring my mind. Let me leave my

self esteem crumpled next to your jeans, our socks, my bra. Because I am milk,

waiting for my expiration while you go off to buy another to fluff your eggs, fill

your bowl, whip your potatoes. I'm conditioned to disregard love because I

still hold you on a pedestal, counting the days since we last spoke, waiting.

Back to Black

*You go back to her and I go back to
black.*

Amy Winehouse, "Back to
Black"

Not watery ink carved calligraphy
on a clean sheet, not naked

coffee that burns like bitter incense.

Not the cold eyes of my childhood

rag doll. But the nonchalant dark

denim jeans tucked in boots that scuff

snow. The hair coiled, curly, cemented

to your sweaty forehead. The polish

on a hangnail, crooked and connected.

It's the asphalt that stains our soles,

making silent changes in heat. More
than the belt, leathered and bending to

my waist. Hugging like this dress I slip
on, christening my curves. Not chucked

coal, burnt like unresolved mistakes. It's
a rotten tooth commanding attention.

It's especially the cat creeping carefully
along the armchair.