

I Don't Want You to Love Me
by Richaundra Thursday

1: Like cookie dough, I tell my kids,

After you've mixed dry and wet ingredients, can't split anymore; disparate particles now chemically married, sibling to conflation, a kaleidoscope crossover of ideas, a sparkling but broken mirage, like how my socially acceptable self-destruction smuggles in under the alias Protestant Work Ethic or how there is no difference between 'I can take care of that,' and 'Are you hungry?' and 'Let me repay you for putting up with me' and 'Please don't leave me.'

There are phantoms on the floor among the dustmotes, gremlins behind the unwashed bowls and I'm so afraid they're tempting you to abandon me so I exorcise the fridge, baptize the microwave, wield this broom like an acrophobic witch and pray the spell is strong enough to bind us, that the kitchen sponge confessionals are enough to absolve my socialized sins.

Like a linguistic stereotype, I have 500 different words for 'I'm sorry' but only one for 'no.'

2. I am faceblind to the differences, so instinct is to be gracious before good, nice before safe, gifting smiles like bouquets to entitled barbarians, a Pavlov's bells defense, how many 'Thank you's' have dripped from my snout in response to threats masquerading as compliments. How do I separate kind from craven, responsible adult from anxious mess when my whole life people have told me I was good for the things I do out of self-loathing?

My friend asks if i have any happy music and when i switch playlists, he asks if i know the difference between happy and angry and I'm scared that i don't and terrified that's why I'm a poet.

3: My robot is paradoxically non-binary. My fallen angel is a frustratingly pretty boy, my vampire is a high femme fatale.

I do not know how to separate my girl from my monster, intimacy from cannibalistic consumption; only the demon is strong enough to let anyone close enough to hurt me because it pretends it can control how. I don't know how to want you to want me without giving myself a carnivore's fanged smile, only a short afterthought line separates 'slay' and 'stay.'

4. I don't know if my repulsion at being called 'ma'am' is a desire to be recognized as gender non-conforming or one to NOT be recognized as an adult. Integrate means I can't tell where the damaged bits of me end, the difference between strengthening scar tissue and necrotic polyps so sometimes I carve all of it out with a cherry pitter, just to be on the safe side. The etymological glue holding together bittersweet; integrate is holistic which means when I am asked what kind of help I've come in for that day, I don't know how to isolate which system is failing.

5. They say find the people who fit you, like puzzles, like our borders are soft cardboard and not tempered glass shards, not so much clicking into place as grinding, integrate means smooth out your edges or risk being alone, which is to say that integrate can mean conformity, but it also means to bring out the best in everyone welcomed into the mosaic, the rejection of othering in the knowledge that we are all spinning together, so we dive into the rock tumbler, hoping we come out jewels.



Fading
by Lyn Patterson

Lyn is a deeply invigorated poet who delves into the themes of identity, equity, overcoming trauma, accepting your wild and learning to listen to your intuition. She is a 31-year-old poet, dancer, and educator originally from Seattle, Washington. She currently travels full time which has allowed her to observe many great cities and watch the small phenomena of American life which can be similar but more importantly nuanced in their differences. Lyn is specifically inspired to write about those who are marginalized in our society, as a means of empowering future generations with their stories.

Jealous hour hands
steal smiles
off lips
yearning for a kiss.

Stale air smells of
floral stench
drenched
from neck to hips.

Fading beauty pressed
for infinity
finds comfort
in the arms of a lover.

Too young to hold her
nevertheless,
waiting by his side
time slips by.



Stung
by Juliette Sebock

My scars start to burn, the tissue
beneath, the purpled piece of skin.

It's like you're here again.

I'm supposed to be the scorpion,
perched and ready to sting.

I tend to tuck my tail when you're around.

Your Cancer brings its own venom,
a long-term wait for fatality.

I guess that's because you'll never leave.



A Mother's Legacy
by Keana Aguila Labra

We were not always so separate. I remember at a young age watching a scene in which a daughter spurns her mother;

I swore never to be as cold. But, what was to warn me of a mother whose eyes always stared beyond the horizon? What of a mother who could not see beyond the weariness of the lines in her hands, nching deeper into her flesh each year? She who stared at herself in the

mirror and wanted more than a childhood shirked by forced responsibility, encapsulated in a crying mound of flesh;

he does not confess to seeing me this way. But, I can imagine myself in her position; I have once been in that same scenario. I laughed at the irony. I pledged I would never be like her, but there we were: eparated by points in time but faced with the same ultimatum.

he decisions my mother and I made, stark opposites, neither right nor wrong, only right for bearer. And, we are not right for each other.