

ten poems

by natasha sharma

Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes:

*Here are some words to be indulged. “hum like the electric feel a band once / sang
hundreds of rip-van-years ago” “my fingernails whiten / on the edge of coffin
wood” “yet my scar-crowed neck creases to pray—” “around the vowels / these
people are / making me feel / queasy in my folds,” There are some fine lines here
scattered about...HS (Spacing is poet’s own.)*

ellie

shaking all my bristles

out the night before I see her

will she remember my whistle?

my gasp before her face?

I’ve worn this thrice, it is soft

even for her brushed cheeks

I go with reluctance,

she has practiced her crawl

I wrap a computer cord

around my forearm to advance

she’ll appreciate this effort to forestall

her gnaw

it's only a show

when her terrified tears fall

my grasp is another toy for her,

her tug actually pierces

this is how she'll grow,

without any of my memory

ellie, my youngest daughter,

classic in her crescendo

for now, all words unknown,

slaps my guffawing face

refugee's daughter

when I was born you

remembered the fleeing, you dropped

me in a well of fear, anger,

diminishing color,

you grew our now planted disease

had you stayed with me,

had you heard me screaming my own sounds

I would've bunched lavender stalks,

rained drops of vinegar on your violet petals,

read sweeping novels of myanmar

anew to remind me how you were,

maybe, there

fifty years after fleeing you stop

my legs from shaking with generous

fury, deep in thought

I need your pretend slap, bristling

beard saved for vacations so

urgently growing you asked,

“why aren’t you crying,” lined me

forever yours

as each doctor, curious

after my bruising asthma,

strokes your daughter’s oils, tell me

does your heart still mend its roughness

against those forsaken yellow fields?

how you look when you sleep

the euphonies of honey mold

dew-like into the pauses

that are really sink holes

into the roads of his inner ear

I drive my fingernails

along these crispy ridges

I twirl my young, black

hair until it holds flat like paper

marks where blue nib meets flesh,

ready for you to lick, wrap

hairy binds around your tongue

this is what I see when I hear you

hum like the electric feel a band once

sang hundreds of rip-van-years ago

while we fucked in a truck bed

lit bouncy red through our exhaust

kissing the dead

“do it,” he whispers

my fingernails whiten

on the edge of coffin wood

the stench of marigolds

weigh in my nostrils

I can taste his fear

on my tongue, I clench

my neck bends toward Amma’s

awaiting skin, crackly

I swallow, sick with wanting

her lips stick to me.

my eyes tighten, saliva

oozes through the teeth:

“do you still love her?” he leans

upon my back till her casket snaps

and we pivot

love letter to my pupil

to be honest, I wanted to lick her inked thumb

but she wants to put only her cream pinky up.

her quill stands out among the chalked pencilheads,

bobbing along down the aisles of this mark'd

classroom.

her school notes croon waxy in any mindspace left

open, across a span of jotted lined papers.

she sits quietly.

I tip my fingertips over her ridged knuckles.

now, we both crave

a raging in that brilliant, red, wooden cage

flying around in her wonderful mind.

funerary conversion

white christ remains glowing, two arms nailed up to heaven
black, nested oil pools along his pores
between the ring fingers, he has crossed against our rebellion

i need the seduction of a blacker horsetail bob,
shaved down, fibers plucky in my mama's naked brush,
yet my scar-crowed neck creases to pray—

mum's eyes rimmed with masala,
targeting papa's royal elephant,
he stands timber in a field of punjabi mustards

papa's crepe eyes rimmed with rice,
stuffing soggy lentils into an oaken rifle,
bending knee before my bleached blossom

my eyes rimmed into ombré palettes of dirts, darks
envious of converted sistercousins spinning rosaries
'round the yellowing armies of our mashed kin

my bicolor palms folded beneath

a contrary idol hung with garlands of marigold,
fresh from amma's pyre smoked from fairy ash

our local gynecologist

he's pulling forth out of the wound of my womb

plucked guitar strings in unison

chevron, black and pink braids stripe down

my back in a woven manner, foresee his attraction

he glues me down and paints black pools under my skin

I press against my veins, beseeching

to be cut out—purged—to not be left

behind, useless he sketches into the burning

backness of me but I do not yield—

the flesh as a tongue seared he plucks me out

and drops me onto a platter of pathologies:

ears, eyeballs, and various membranes

I am left a harmony gathered as thorns

in the brush to tear at the woman-bouquet

of everything cursive

manic beneath some art

my coconut sheen cheeks waft

above a stale mouth [automatic gestures]

eyes rap along a wheezing melody

of this painting [a woman

wearing earrings she's forgotten exist]

this was not at a different time

odors match her beauteous

face [pound for a pound] white blouse

doesn't have frills [nor a V-neck

water metaphor], but her breast

is lighter to the eye who

kneads the darkest inks for love

various moldings [bubbles of flesh]

around the base of her nose

[as if, in faking,] her skin puckers

accordingly. she's had dinner [twice]

already, the effort is making her skin pucker

again

bold & blueish—rust

we walk with dignity,
as though we may
still have pearls baubles
she guides my hand through
broken grass, over
stunted iron leftovers
walking where the police dreamt
we'd never go it is our first time
a fabric rucksack bounces over
our calves, per paperback dramas

I wish there was someone with us
to admonish us, to fear
suddenly, we are here
the empty pool; the empty motel
a weepy rustbelt

a dizzy, religious conversion in St. Anne's Library

I'm scared, mama

their meticulously tucked

messybuns, cashmere

sweaters, scratchy on the inside,

cold on the out

I beg you to hold me down

beneath our sea-gull patterned

quilt, downy with no one's

fur their religiously midwestern

jugular is eating

our old language, once

loud and large

around the vowels

these people are

making me feel

queasy in my folds, mama

I am repeating for you, mama

you said to cozy up every lie

with a repetition, mama,

I repeat for you, mama

this conversion is taking too long,

the night is outlined around mama's

confusion scary for Kali, even

I refuse. I accept. I get

my bearings from their wet

tarmac shaking in my head

THE POET SPEAKS: *Federico Garcia Lorca's interpretation and imagination of the term Duende has been the strumming in my writing life, so far. I am completely wrapped up in the concept the Andalusian duende as a looming red-skeleton, who targets the tormented suffering artists and propels us into the extremities of creativity. Poetry is very much life and death for me. I reach for it as a second generation South Asian American, an individual with Bipolar I, and a dropout from a PhD program. I survive on its blood. For me, poetry is my success, my validation. I work on a poem for days, weeks on end even if I know no one else sees its success because it succeeds to move me. For that introverted reason, I'm extremely honored and humbled when a stranger admires my work. Thank you, many times over, for reading my stuff.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Natasha Sharma's poems represent growing up in the American Midwest as a second generation Indian, touching on mental health issues, trauma, and ecstasies of the everyday. She holds a Masters in English from Miami University of Ohio and is working on her first chapbook.*