

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Terhi K. Cherry: Two Poems

Terhi K. Cherry · Wednesday, February 24th, 2021

Driving Through Death Valley

strange happiness swept over
him. Perhaps the angle of the sun
cast a shadow off the sand dunes,
and he recognized it
as his own. Perhaps he got out
of the car, wrestled
his own body to the ground,
tried to beat the truth
out of it. Then walked away
in surrender, dusted
his arms. Back on the road,
past the sculpted
hills, a dip below sea level,
he hit the lowest point
and the hottest place at once,
and thought of her.
How the ground shone
white, the way salt flats leaned
against the Black Mountains.
Her head had rested
on his chest. Near Badwater Basin
and the honeycomb shapes,
he imagined her as a pillar of salt.
How she had turned
the other cheek –
and wasn't she always
looking in the direction
of going,
while every lake dried up, and
no rain sustained the heat?
And wasn't she meant to be
the body of water
that carries life, and hadn't he

brought the fish –
 then why are these godforsaken
 lands so full of beauty,
 so poisonous, no one would
 touch? Wasn't he lost, too,
 speeding through the badlands
 like Dante's Circles of Hell,
 unable to choose
 between good and evil,
 between gadflies and snakes,
 between the earth
 ruptured, and the heaven
 she'd built like a roof over
 his heart? Wasn't he
 a beast?
 Perhaps the sting he felt
 below the collarbone
 had been love,
 but these wilds
 were no place
 for a man
 to break down.
 Not over a woman.
 He stepped on the gas,
 as if the car could pull him
 out of the sea
 of her worry,
 shoot him up
 to the highest point
 at Dante's View –
 where he could
 stand like a man,
 look down at the Inferno,
 count the miles
 back to her.

*

At Denny's

with a line from Quentin Tarantino's
 Pulp Fiction.
 I didn't grow up with guns.
 I didn't learn to dodge a bullet.
 I didn't know I would be sitting
 next to a Glock Model 19
 at brunch, thinking what if someone
 pulls out a weapon?
 I asked him, between candy colored
 shakes & pancakes, 'Do you

have a gun on you?’ Because
let’s not kid ourselves –
there are more guns than people
& some honey bunny could execute
every mother fucking last one
of us at the counter.
‘I’m surgical’, he said,
but I saw how quickly
his hand moved & sweat broke.
They worry about
the rights of good people,
the screen time of children,
the nightly intruder –
but not the kid
who gets a firearm easier than a job,
who flashes cash
for the camera & cocks a gun.
While we reload our coffees,
the kid enters the quad.
Pulls a .45 from his backpack.
Curls a finger, smiles.

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