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# 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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