

Poetry Series

Danielle Nguyen
- poems -

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Danielle Nguyen()

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Their mindless, bowing heads
Don't look too different from Germany 1940s
Don't look too different from ants at the queen
Don't look too different from vapid, suckling piglets
Don't look too different from mob-mentality zombies
Don't look too different from prepackaged
Don't look too different from suffocated
Don't look too different from mass-produced by-products
Don't look too different from the matching row of pews
Don't look too different from the same staggered hypocritical killing
Don't look too different from the same old
Same old
Same old stupid subservient sated slaves searching for salvation

Danielle Nguyen

6/18/2006

When afternoons are quiet and
birds chirp outside,
I think of my father.
I can see him standing there,
can see his fluffy black hair
and the delight of his smile.
He is clean,
like his crisp work shirts
and short fingernails

I hear his strange laughter
scare the cat,
who he speaks to regularly.
I suspect it is because
only things that are truly alive
can hear the melody in his voice.
Only a kindred spirit
could recognize the calm dignity
of greatness.

Men cannot talk to animals
But my father is above mere men.

Danielle Nguyen

A Thought

I have taken this opportunity of the frozen morning-night
to reflect upon the now-cooled sweat of your skin,
the broad planes of your back upon which the
moonlight drifts, falling into subtle shallows
and the steep ditch of your spine.

Your eyes are closed, and your lashes form
peaceful half-curves above your cheeks,
and I wonder:

If those eyes were open now, and
widened as just before you smile so brilliantly,
would they have the blue-grey cast of a newly shored oyster shell?
Or would a secret green whisper through,
as though the gentle light which permeates a forest to
breathe life into the dusty earth passed through you,
touching my face with its sublime warmth.

Your too-long hair takes its vengeance against your meddlesome hands;
it splays about your face, liberated of your head-tosses, your fussing,
your half-attentive battle against obscured vision.
I love running my fingertips through that hair,
feeling the familiar tilt of your head,
the quiet sigh of your shoulders. The impossible air-texture of it.

I love taking those hands in mine, feeling their
careful strength and their honest roughness, and smiling that
I don't mind if you don't use lotion.

And even when you lie asleep, there is movement:
the motion of your steady breath,
the motion within me when I breathe this simple thought:

You really are quite lovely.

Danielle Nguyen

Acrostic

Perhaps it was in that particular
MOment when it was finally confessed that
ThE lives of the two became marked and
ParT of her would always have the truth of lies
CleaR in the back of her mind,
SurelY contradicting her rules and certainly
secretly tainting her love story.

Danielle Nguyen

Come Home

You're so sad.

I can tell when my fingers move
before your empty stare
When my inquiries are quelled
with simple, soft smiles
close-mouthed, like your heart.

Has your world hardened around you
like a convalescent skin?
I thought we both knew
that my hands are far too gentle
to break anything.

Nothing I give you
will erase the horrors of life
But I can make promises
and I can magnify its riches.
Cold winters beneath the moon
Black beaches born from
Volcano tears;
A single man before you, bare.

Don't you see that
I miss you?

Danielle Nguyen

Faded

Small desert flowers like
small, soft hands,
nestled in a pool of sand,
helpless under the indifferent sun,
reached their curved lips to an empty sky,
never knowing what it means to wilt.

For a brief moment,
the universe was still.
Their tiny red veins beneath
silk flesh
were undisturbed
and every grain of sand was quiet,
hushed and solid,
a soft pile under a soft blue vastness.

When I held a single cup in my palm,
it occurred to me how gently
the thin petals shivered.
I could so plainly feel their
cool moisture evaporating,
sinking into the leather skin of my
rough, clumsy palms.
The sun was high, and
I could not protect them from its
stinging rays. No shift of
my fingers, no amount of cradling,
no quiet pleading would stop
the frail gasp of their surrender to my
unwitting hands.

When I finally let go,
all that fluttered down were
crippled remains
of something so purely,
so vulnerably beautiful.

I stood over what was now mine:
scattered, parched petals,

like dry victims of
my own foolishness.

Danielle Nguyen

Haiku 1

Fog glows and hazes
Fills the mountain gaps, covers
Muting sight and thought

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Inside

If I were to be truthful
you would know that I do not simply love you
in happiness
and that I do not simply bend for you
as my eyes close, serene
But that also, sometimes
I hate you.

You warm me, calm me
and shine like the clean white sunlight
that silhouettes us every morning
when I wake up, loving you
from solaced nights, loving you.
You surprise me and humble me
with every reminder of how
I am alive
and I am alive with you.

And when you move to me,
and you know, and I know
how very small I am before you;
The way your words will hurt me,
The way I am so rooted
And the way I will be rooted;
I feel myself falter, withdraw,
Feel the soft, delicate gauze that swathes me
(which you caress with the hands I love)
press too close to this razor, tucked so quietly
Which cuts me, too.

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Lune 1

I wish that
It didn't hurt to love
you this hard

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Lune 2

Just one moment
Indulge in worries before sliding
Back into place

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Messages

I wait for night time.
I, the messenger of dreams,
stand under the black expanse
arching tall and vastly silent
and I think of you, what you must look like
the slow slope of your back,
white under the silver light
moonlight against the stillness of snow.

Eyelids descend, open my palms
and I feel the sky breathe past my fingers
I see stars; they're like
that warm peace
of falling asleep to the smell of your bed
Cup my hands around
the soft light
and sing to it with my breath
sing prayers that my words,
whispers like petals,
will float to you over treetops,
kissed by the clouds to fall to your lips
waiting for you to wake as though
waking to my own.

I call to the night's birds
give them my messages of
your face so bright in my mind
like dawn creeping
eclipsing my shoulders
Your memory seeps in
wrapping over, around my arms as though
sharing my coat.
I tell them about the way
I can smell the woods and shade
in your hair
Tell them they can find you where
the sun first meets the moon
that in-between calm; it sounds like
the way my heart beats for you.

Tell them to lay this message softly upon your ears
so as not to disturb your dreams
let them float inward
to wake you with my words:
poems written in the night,
by these hands, waiting for yours.

Danielle Nguyen

Prophecy

Eventually she will wear out
Slipping like shadows past his fingers.

Eventually he will wear out
Edging further on the bench, still loved.

And since nothing lasts forever,
Eventually this junction will shut down
Him tired and sighing
Her forlorn and inadequate
The two of them, finished.

Danielle Nguyen

Purgatory

Was it a heaven-place or a hell-place? They asked me.
And when I looked up, I wondered if they could see
a sky so grey.

I tell them, it was both.

When I woke up, there was nothing:
no thirst, no hunger,
no hot, no cold.

And when I opened my eyes,
all color was as mute as
the muffled ringing of the air.

The light was a smooth fog;
Perception was an afterthought,
distant calls from dusty corners.

But when I reached and grasped nothing,
a clarity struck me:

I did not see your face.

All around me, the blur
my muddled vision,

my muddled thoughts were stricken like
each nerve within bloomed ice.

My clenching, frozen body lay under the sky,
an emptiness I felt no desire to reach for
lest I dissolve, though I realized

I was already laid to waste.

Each muscle held the familiar ache,
an echo of your touch, as though
radiating a vague memory.

And when I forced myself to my knees,
my bones creaked

and my joints whined,

soft protests shooting through.

There was but one thing left -

just one, never both:

either you, or my life without you.

No death;

only the unforgiving, gray sky.

Signs

Remember how I would yield for you?
Yield, stop thought
I would think,
what am I doing? and
why?
All reason has reached a dead end;
thought reads 'No Outlet' and cul-de-sac-s,
And unmarked speed bumps are
laughably ineffective, anyway.

I wonder:
if there were DO NOT ENTER signs,
how much they would matter.
Fifty
Sixty
70 mph -
Warning: fasten seatbelts,
high altitudes lead to bloody noses.

And now look where we've crash-landed
all signs of life hushed,
stars falling from the sky.
I pray for the sun;
my bridge has iced over and
I can't go back
without a streetlight in sight.
Everyone knows
the moon is too cold to soothe the heart.

But god,
how blinding the light can be.
How it renders those signs useless,
shining unrestrained,
the life of it striking my eyes.

Danielle Nguyen

The Gardener

I tell you, "There are weeds in your hair, "
and you squint up, roughened at the knees,
dirt between the frays of your jeans
and on the angle of your jaw.

The scene must have been this:
You, folded humbly,
so as not to offend the ivy buds,
placed your spade on the grass
without looking,
lashes lowered,
and your cigarette dangling at
a most recklessly balanced angle,
sending up smoke to wind around
the sunbeams peering over your shoulders.

Your hands are, of course, ungloved
and I can sense the echo of your voice
mouthing your first explanation
of how the dirt always makes
the tobacco sweeter.

I reach down
and gently extract a wayward stem,
holding it before you, aware
that my fingertips grazed your unkempt hair
a little deeper than they needed to.

And you tell me,
"I hope you like peonies."
"I picked them so I can smell you when you're gone."

You blink slowly,
and you say,
"I never had a garden
before you."

Danielle Nguyen

They Told Us

We'd hear all the time that we'd understand when we're older,
but no one ever said that there'd be
world hunger,
mothers dying,
fathers killing fathers and
children losing faith in each other,
and most of all,

No one ever told us about the personal tragedies.
We never heard about tears. The way
sitting on curbs in cities at night,
every far-off crisis was just that:
Far-off.
And when we would turn up our palms,
our lined hands glittered in our blurred vision,
a sick irony to the starshine sky above.
Wet skin like wet, haggard inhales.

No one ever said heartbreak was real.
They gave us flat geometric cutouts and scotch tape,
valentines pieced whole, complete; like that could ever resemble the
splintered, ragged shards ground into themselves, into a
bloody slab of pavement anchored by our
trembling feet,
aching knees, and
shaking hands.

Like every touch,
every glimmer of sunshine was enough to
flash us in time to a gasping collapse.

We'll be okay.
But it's the misled children on the curbs of this world who
reach their throbbing, ribboned fingers for
something more;
who try to reach that starlight out in heaven somewhere.
Because maybe out there,
understanding or not understand feels right.

We've learned that happy endings are just
frail, beautiful figments of fiction.
And that, maybe, when you're older
you finally understand:
Most of the time,
being okay is the most you can really ask for.

Danielle Nguyen

Time

When this started, you were tall
You were all the way up there, a statue.

I climbed.

You keep going, and you forget that you grow
and when I looked around, I noticed -
I could meet you, now.
Instead of reaching and grasping fingertips
neck aching from gazing sky-high
we were hand-to-hand, eyes to mouth
and my legs had stretched to place me there.

Being big is only relative to how little you are.
Getting this tall, tall like you
you can see the whole world from up here.

And with these strong new legs,
I stepped away
Walking new strides
Feeling this new body
Looking back and seeing the way
you shrunk in the horizon.

My last words were as subtle as
how concaves and convexes curved
in the most strategic of places
Arches discreet like the fade of autumn to winter
This change ungraspable like a forgotten song.
Once we met eyes-to-eyes
you saw the way mine said,
"I don't love you anymore."

You heard the way my steps said,
"Goodbye."

Danielle Nguyen

Try

I was going to stand in front of you.
I was going to make you smile like
fresh cupcakes on your birthday or
a non-platonic Valentine.

I was going to tell you,
No one else, no one else, no one!
I was going to say,
You and only you
I promise.

I was going to show you the way
you make my smile spread
Was going to reveal how
mute people speak
how to sculpt without your hands,
making existence without matter.

I was going to let it all spill out
Jumbling from a toybox
Blocks like jewels, hopeful and bright
Scurrying on the carpet, shivering

But I'm just a little girl.
And what adults like and what
little girls have to give
aren't always the same.

This is a game of chance.
Maybe if I knew that
this construction paper card,
love dribbled in Elmer's glue,
heart timid and glittering
wouldn't end up in a forgotten shoebox

neglected and damned to linger with dust bunnies

Maybe if I knew that
these things were enough
I would have done more than
sat down in this nursery
tucked in my legs
and written you this poem.

Danielle Nguyen

Winter

Snow.

I froze Like a brick wall.

Look up. Was she crying?

So quiet. Silent ringing.

Next morning it was gone,
melted away. Thank God.

The way I said I'd hold you.

How the snowflakes fell on your hair.

Pinned there, alone

I finally cried

but still you're not with me.

It was so cold when I broke.

An incomprehensible pain;
more than my actions hurt you,
the pain of hurting you.

The night need say nothing;
the hush of snowfall, and above
all your absence, was deafening enough.

The sorrow of wanting to deserve you,
of my mistakes, of you, of still loving you.

The snow's whispered beauty.

Gentle, terrible reminders of grasping at memory
and feeling only the lack.

Left immobile in the cold, standing

Silenced, numb, and
defeated.

Danielle Nguyen

Zigga Zigga

Oh! You pretty things. he says
Let's rock
The hair almost electric, tacky and tall
The face glittering and shining
The mouth so malleable, purring
Clinging and swishing
Gripping that stand like a man
Hey, you! You better dance
Or else he'll make those rainbows frown down
Stomp those snakeskins and
Pout snarl sniff and toss, horses and lions, scarecrows and licorice sticks
Fairy dust, oh cast your spell on us
You magic master, you piper, our darling!

Danielle Nguyen