

Verse

BY TERESE MASON PIERRE

After the reading they have energy, block the sidewalk. We can't make a decision about where we will say I love you later. They find a pub on ____ Street and go to the top floor to opine into the wet air. They slosh on about ____'s bad, tell me specifically what a contest poem is, complain about paper submissions. We laugh at the men who perform too much, at that out-of-town woman who doesn't read this kind of lit, ask what we are dismantling, what we are making diverse, what kind of fire we need fuel for, and what kind of fuel. If I sit next to them at the bar, am I elevated?

Your arm around me is noticed, but politely unremarkable. We have been told that our creativity compounds, but we are still no better. A man announces he has to smoke, and half the group alights from the balcony. I am who I am so I can't talk shit about anyone. I especially can't write shit about trees and whose sex life can't survive a storm. But you told me my poems were sensual, took photos of me at the open mic earlier. You guided me through this sludge here—I thank you for keeping me shiny and enthusiastic, I pay for your whiskey sour.

You talk like a violin in my ear and to the poets at the table who dig your brand of music, the lattice verses in your notebook. You were at the launch, too, and in ____ after, climbed out of a pit they pretend they were born in. We are only friends with poets who hate other people's poems, who are themselves a forcible balance of disenchanted and vain. Hearing them read, it's immolation—watching them drink and talk over me, they are so utterly normal, and I swell. It's us against language, ultimately, hoping for a ride on the lion's back.

You tell me you love me at one a.m. They are drunk. My mother is upset that I always write into the morning. You tell me you will write a poem about me. I ask what journals you'll submit to. You spit in the street