

Sandy Coomer

My Name is . . .

When the barista at Starbucks, poised with pen against cup,
asked me my name, I looked into his coffee-brown eyes
and said Agnes –
just like that. And, just like that, he wrote it
in bold capital letters and went about brewing and pouring
while I pondered why Agnes had come out of my mouth
with no pre-thought or planning and the many times
I wanted to be someone else
but not Agnes,
though it's as fine a name as any.

Once, I knew a girl named Meadow
and another named River
and I wished I had said one of those names, or maybe
chosen the name of one of my mother's high school friends
whose parents labeled all the girls after the states
they were born in – Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky –
strong names with a sense of where they'd been
and where they were going.

While I contemplated who I might be
the next time I ordered a Mocha Lite Frappuccino,
the barista nodded his head, said
Agnes
and the way he said it, drawn out with feeling,
sexy even, the syllables floating above the music
and conversation, made the whole shop stop
to see who this Agnes was –
we all waited for Agnes to take her drink,
all of us together waited,
while the barista stared with his coffee eyes
and with a startled *Oh*,
I remembered it was me.

Postcard to My Father from the Mojave Desert

I'm burning here. The back of my throat constricts,
and vowels come out like sand, easily scattered
but heavy when scooped and bagged. All the words
we strung on the line from home led me, sunbaked,
to this world of extremes. Hot days. Cold nights.
A silence so loud it fractures our vision until we
can't see ourselves or each other. The spines
of a barrel cactus spear my leg. I taste its flower,
the bloom of blood orange on my tongue, and spit
seeds to the wind. The creosote bush paints a shadow
for the scorpion and its poisonous claw. A diamondback,
camouflaged in pebbles, sips the air for a taste of prey.
The desert is thirsty, the sky an unbreakable blue.
Joshua trees spread stout arms upward, speaking peace
in whispers only bats can hear. I look for little things
that color a world possible: a needle-splintered sun,
a pink cloud that proves nothing dies without first
folding its heart in surrender. The bats rise from the rocks
in one harmonious wave. They feast. The trees are praying,
still praying for rain.

The First Time I Ate Oysters

I found a pearl.

The smooth whiteness a rarity, an omen,
the gemstone of June,
the month of your birth.

The first time we met

led to the first time

we kissed, leaning against your car
in the cool midnight relief of a sulking summer.

The first time you bought me a cheap dinner at Applebees.

The first time you bought sweet wine
and we drank it in the car
and drove home drunk and singing.

The first time I said I love you

and didn't mean it.

The first time you met my parents.

The first time you said you saw my father in me

and it wasn't just the eyes,

which led to the first time we argued.

The first time

I felt homesick for you,

the weight of it like a boot in the gut.

The first time I said I love you

and was afraid to mean it.

All the times I admitted, if only to myself,

I wasn't sure what love was, what the big deal was, what the point was, what the excuse was
and was this love

and was I loveable

and why didn't I feel loveable.

The first time I said I had plans that didn't include you.

The first time I learned pearls arise from suffering.

The first time I said all my plans included you.

The first time I said I love you

and thought I meant it and was afraid what it meant to feel

this exposed, this vulnerable -

the way a pearl must feel
ripped
out of the oyster.

I Won't Call This a Love Poem

What is it you see in me when you steal
those glances, as if to look too long
might make you confess some secret

long gripped tight inside you?
And why is it that when you say
the word *love*, I see a flash of light

through the keyhole
of your sturdy, well-carved face?
For a moment I think you might

excuse yourself, leave the room
and shake out the bunched-up quiver
in your voice, but you swallow it back

and move on. To the soldier in you
who has known too much the death
of all that's fragile,

and the way any sign of weakness
can get your eye shot out,
I say, well played.

There are far too many flirtations
and love songs for any of it to mean much.
What do you say we keep hidden

our blue-bruised hearts? We'll be
anomalies, not saying our valentines,
not sharing our tentative trust.

If we're good enough, we can hold
this together for a lifetime, our friendship,
a shadow dance with knives,

our warmth bleeding each other dry.