

THAT GUM YOU LIKE // COURTENAY S. GRAY

*For all the outsiders*

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## summary

Blue ribbon/lit by electricity/little bombshell with her  
secrets/only a man in a red room can find out/the  
curtains bubble and ripple/like the most unreliable  
river/ketchup bottles swapped out for vials of blood/a  
little town full of habitual horror/bodies to  
inhabit/exceptional coffee at the diner by the  
roadside/liquid gold in a porcelain cup/the mysteries of  
humanity/an existence that is borne of a place/acid rain  
will wash it all away/if you let him in/he'll find your  
weaknesses/beyond the capabilities of your  
morality/viewing the world through one eye/eggshell  
town/cracked open to release the evil/nothin' happens  
there/don't wanna kill nobody/neighbour lends a bag of  
sugar/sweet milk in a glass bottle/dancing out the  
steps/just like the blue rose/rarity responds to  
nicety/around every corner is man/he has silver hair and  
a denim jacket/he's a needer/we are the  
feeders/cockroaches with skin/brazen and below the  
belt/kiss her mouth/full of static/a sliver of  
despondency/waiting to be delivered

# Red Room

You'd walk through the door with your overnight bag.  
Your toothbrush still had blood on it from the morning,  
where your gums wouldn't stop bleeding. After you  
handed me your USB drive, you sat on the couch and  
cried. She would never tell you how he died/kept it a  
secret for an exceedingly long time. You'd packed fresh  
underwear for me, just in case mine got soiled by you  
later in the evening. It had been one of those days where  
it was dull, but the scent of summer still heavily present.  
When she knocked on my door, I knew I'd lost you for  
good.

shivers run down my spine  
listening for the shadows  
of your wild decline

# the man with two faces

You trim the rosebush outside/shears in hand with that  
neighbourly smile/they think you're kind and  
generous/offering extra compost for plants/squeezing the  
rose petals into juice/you take a vial and pocket the  
substance/later pricking her finger/blood mixed with  
rosewater/she clutches her rosary beads/beyond a case of  
humanity/a blank slate/morality is twisted into a tight  
knot/show him beauty/he'll show pain

*Flatline*

*Breathe*

*Flatline*

*Breathe*

*Fire*

*Flatline*

*Return*

# Secrets

As the dust settles – powdered pink with sprinkles. Goldilocks loses her nerve, resorting to consuming the heart of her abuser. In terror, she stretches out her arm – necklace in hand. Loneliness is a plague on the human ecosystem. She reaches out to find the humbling embrace of a man, a man to navigate the world for her. She can't steer this ship alone. In a fog of time, her eyes adjust to the magicians on stage. The bottom half of their bodies disappear into the floor—floating heads who push their way into her stomach. There are so many locks to unpick, starting with the tiniest knots of the bunch. How can she fear death and welcome it at the same time?

[Put one foot in front of the other]

[Brush your teeth]

[Leave the door unlocked]

[Easy access]

[Don't let him in]

# leaving her behind

her vagina was like the blue rose. whenever I brought my mind to thoughts of her inner thigh — awash with the fruits of her pleasure. she was an uninhabitable spirit, but as my luck would have it; she let me in. mom always praised the one before, but she did indulge in the dethroning of her only son. for all my loneliness, her gestures made my heart swell. people were dying, and the world was in a crisis. yet, I'd never been so happy. once we finally met, we would have taken a streetcar through the city — admiring the promising aroma of chardonnay and peach parfait. my desire was wrapped up in a sheath of deception, unwilling to tell her the fate of my mortality. the devil on my shoulder would burn like the cranberry sun, painfully aware of the organ growing in my pants. my only respite from this demonic existence was her popping up on my phone. who needs drugs when you have her? I'd hurt myself just so she didn't have to do it alone. violence is the cultural essence of our species, taking it in turns to cement further torture. for my last night, I got drunk as a skunk on absinthe. visions of her lying beside my motionless corpse haunt me. for a scene so devastating, she looked arresting. life is one big magnifying glass, and the only speck I see is the woman I never got to meet.

under the thumb of  
the history of my love  
they only see youth

# leaving her behind – burning haibun

her [redacted] was like [redacted]. [redacted] [redacted]  
my mind [redacted] her inner thigh [redacted]  
[redacted] was an uninhabitable spirit [redacted]  
[redacted]  
praised [redacted]  
[redacted] her only son [redacted] for [redacted]  
[redacted] people [redacted] dying [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] promising [redacted]  
[redacted] desire [redacted]  
[redacted] in a sheath of deception [redacted]  
[redacted] the devil [redacted]  
like the cranberry sun [redacted]  
[redacted] my only respite [redacted]  
[redacted] was [redacted]  
drugs [redacted] hurt [redacted]  
[redacted] violence [redacted]  
[redacted] taking [redacted]  
[redacted] last night [redacted] as a [redacted]  
[redacted] motionless corpse [redacted]  
[redacted] for [redacted] she [redacted]

is one [REDACTED] speck I see [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] her [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] dying [REDACTED] in a

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] cranberry [REDACTED] respite was [REDACTED]

hurt [REDACTED]

taking [REDACTED] a [REDACTED] corpse [REDACTED]

speck [REDACTED]

# the bar at the end of the world

I'll wait for you at the end of the world. our table will cry tears of joy for the last drinks we share, a candle bursting with a fury of flames. leaving the darkness behind with a trail of sulphur. black cats are leaving omens around the crumbling infrastructures. People are being sick out of sheer panic, strings of partially digested food strewn across the asphalt. as the world explodes, our limbs will be intertwined. the sky will burst like a blister, showering us in what is ultimately the end. black and white strips of photo booth memories will fall from the walls, vanishing along with our DNA.

as the curtains close  
the audience claps along  
leave them wanting more

# Lynch

1. A car wreck in the Hollywood Hills. The dark-haired girl — a raven, hidden in baby skin. Possibly concussed, stumbling into the symphony of luminescence with fresh blood painting trauma on her body. The uncomfortable quiet of unforeseen tragedy echoes like the seedy hum of an underground nightclub. A grown man reduced to fear by a seemingly impossible dream, a duo of nightmarish fantasies. It is neither night nor day when he finds himself stuck in a dizzying loop of surrealism. Man collapses into the arms of another, rendered helpless by a figure with nicotine-stained eyeballs—the beginnings of a smirk emerging on his muddled face.
2. A young woman with golden hair is filled with hope. Entering the field of dreams in a place called LA. A wooden house with a maternal figure to take charge of her new life. The guest finds a woman naked, shielded behind frosted glass; the unknown curves are just visible. A wine-red towel wraps around the injured woman, her memory completely frazzled. Opening the purse, she came with; they find wads of cash and a navy-blue key.

3. To find their true existence, they find themselves in marlin blue opera houses. A woman sings, exuding all the pain that has been trapped in her soul. Both girls cling to each other, terrified of what may be truthful. If everything is an illusion, then why does it feel so real, so true? There is a sapphire box and a key to match. Nobody knows what's inside.
4. A movie director craves creative control. From his fold-up chair, he breathes in the wisteria smoke. His megaphone is cracked — beige tape masking the imperfections that he despises. His actress is dressed up in pink blossom décor, surrounded by existence with the power to judge and destroy. His eyes are piercing. He stares into space with thick-rimmed glasses, pondering his ego.
5. Death by screaming. Unwanted ghosts turn up at her door, waving their hands frantically. Their laughter is louder than the rain. It all ends with the single shot of a gun.
6. Dreams are a dangerously beautiful thing. They keep us moving on this axis we find ourselves on. When an immense sadness consumes us, we look for an escape into a world where anything is possible—blinded

by bright lights, money, and fame. Our faces relish at playing the game of life. The very act of dreaming will bring you before death itself. You'll be on your knees, bound and gagged. Punished for choosing to live inside a dream instead of being completely aware of how banal existence can be. As the heart croons one final time, the bloodied smog of California explodes into the sky's capillaries.

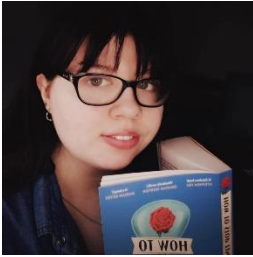
# HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MR PRESIDENT

A glamorous girl with a downpour of glitter. Little handprints on every hood of every car in the parking lot at Wall Street. She slips a love letter under the windscreen wipers — sealed with lipstick. Daddy's girl is waiting with a round lollipop — her lips hooded over its spherical shape. Jawbreaker ribbon running riot through the strands of his pubic hair. Public baths, aquatic diamond blue. Sitting on the side in her leather hot pants, a slice of red velvet cake wrapped in a black box. A little red sugar sticks to her mint lip gloss. Does daddy want to lick it off? A fractured sky, with powdered glass pinching his skin. Debts repaid to the girls who cling to his collar. Only buying him a pizza slice with their last dollar. His true love bathes in gold, beyond the cheap beer and chicken fingers. When all you know is pain, you are more than willing to commit murder down lover's lane.

## Acknowledgements

This little collection of poetry would not have been possible without its main inspiration: Twin Peaks. David Lynch creates the most cinematic pieces. I'd also like to add a thank you to everyone who reads this.

## Author Bio:



Courtenay S. Gray is a writer from the North of England. She has been featured in publications such as Maudlin House, Daily Drunk Mag and Red Fez. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize (2020). Courtenay was a runner up for the 2021 Literary Lancashire Award in Poetry. She also has a poetry collection (Strawberry) coming out with Alien Buddha Press. Twitter: @courtenaywrites / Blog: [www.courtenayscorner.com](http://www.courtenayscorner.com)



**WHAT YEAR IS  
THIS?**