

GRAY

a small collection of poems  
formed over time and semi-accidentally  
by valeri natole

The color gray  
Represents change:  
Ins and outs,  
Darks and lights,  
Goods and bads:

Balance.  
The color gray  
Is the best color  
To describe a journey.

The color gray –  
Balance  
and acceptance  
of Change –  
Is what  
I have always  
Needed.



May you find  
Balance  
and Acceptance  
For yourself.

Here is a small book  
containing thoughts I've had  
and written down over time,  
While working to find comfort  
In the swaying and motion of  
life.

My struggles don't represent  
everyone's.  
I don't know everything – and  
I don't want to.  
Please in no way expect me  
to be perfect –  
I am always willing to learn –  
As we all should be.

Also:  
Please  
Be attentive to yourself.  
If something I've written  
triggers you  
For any reason  
Care for yourself.  
Be attentive to yourself.

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Gray is one of my favorite colors  
Even if I don't necessarily like the way it looks.

Why can I suddenly write  
My soul out?

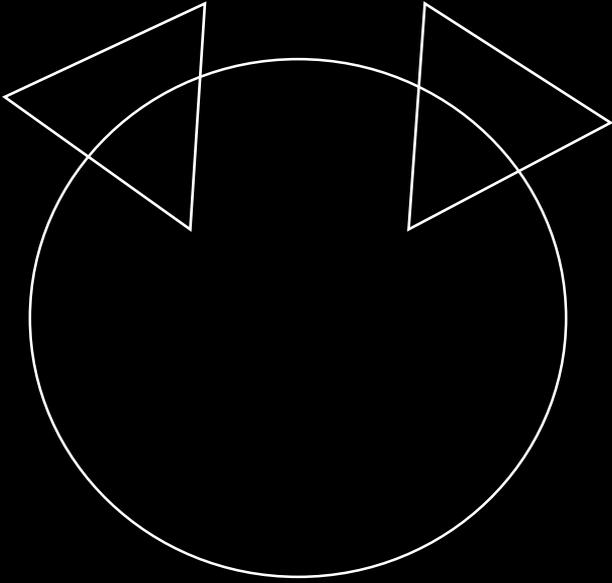
Maybe it's the pen.

But

I purposely switched pens  
To write this poem –

So I guess it's me.

I'm the pen.



## The Stricken

I don't mean to make everything sound bleak.  
I just mean to question it.  
Without questions, what are we?  
    Indifferent, passive.  
    I am not those things.  
It used to make me worry,  
layers of worry like an onion.  
Now I smirk at worry –  
    “You, old friend,  
we can hold each other's hands.”  
Me and Worry are in cahoots.

Why do I like people  
Far away from me?  
Because  
From there  
I cannot touch them  
I can pretend  
They are intangible  
I am their goddess  
They are beautiful  
Up close, I have to face  
Tangible imperfections:  
In blatant terms,  
I am threatened.

I'd like to put one happy thing down on paper  
To capture one graceful moment in time  
A second of a smile  
An eye closed with laughter

This dark dreary headspace  
Is wearing me out  
I'm functioning cleanly  
But there's always a doubt

After a certain age  
We stop looking for monsters under the bed  
But that's when they're really there  
Scariest than a lion in the savannah  
Or a shark in the sea:  
It's our lack of fear that kills us.

I'm glad  
I'm not perfect –  
If I was  
It'd be even harder  
For me to accept  
When others are not.  
Being imperfect  
Has taught me  
Patience.

Don't make me feel temporary  
Even if you can't promise  
That I won't be.

If I had a house  
With a room for every touch:

Three I'd burn  
One hallway, I'd avoid  
One I'd keep re-visiting  
Even though I know it's not good for me  
And one  
I'd crave being inside  
But I wouldn't have the key.

Lovers  
Are a team  
Not a transaction.

When I see a cheap car for sale  
I think of you.  
I'm sure that sounds  
*Terribly*insulting  
But I need to think of you  
Because I still haven't found a way  
To make it up to you  
Without feeling sorry for myself,  
Without hurting myself.

How am I feeling –  
What am I thinking –  
When I am  
Silent suddenly,  
Face stoic,  
Words precise and sparing?  
Well –  
Let me paint you a picture  
In metaphor:

I'm on a ship  
A small dark-oak boat  
That I can't steer  
And without destination  
I sense rocks  
But I can't *see* the *rocks*  
The options?

Jump ship.  
Drown in silence.  
Swim away,  
Maybe make it  
Maybe don't.

Ride it out.  
Force the light.  
Exhausted arms,  
Tight ribcage.  
Maybe make it  
Maybe don't.

We do not deserve language  
We –  
Human beings –  
We do not deserve language.  
Language can be an adhesive  
But we use it as a staple remover.

this is not my home  
this square box  
where the sun shines in but only to hold night's place  
where anyone can walk in  
uninvited  
and smell the damp mold,  
see a smoldering flame at the center  
yet put it out.

i help them put out the square-box flame  
watch it out through my private window-frame  
and I cannot round out the rough edges,  
soften the angles,  
tighten the loose ends,  
fill in the cracks.

this is not my home.

I can hear silence, but  
I can't understand it.  
Does it ring with anger?  
Does it suffer, alone?  
Is it poised on the tip, on the edge,  
Will it end?  
Does it have an originator?  
Is the quiet a spell –  
does it wait to be broken?  
Or does it dissipate,  
    Silent, Still,  
an intangible dot  
From an open wound?

No one knows  
Why it rains on sunny islands,  
Usurping bugs from their boarding-holes,  
Barraging beauty with a wash of welts,  
Puttering out the sounds of sunburnt laughter,  
Origami-gray folding over and over,  
Smooching island-goers in its folds  
We cannot send bright birds to fly  
Through dark and underwhelming skies  
But why, why  
Did the clouds roll in so suddenly?  
There is no logic of why.

This poem  
Is intentional.  
By that I mean  
It has intention –  
Intention to inform:

Your body  
Belongs to you  
And to you only.  
You rule a  
Delicate, Lovely land:  
Your body  
Is not  
A democracy  
Or a republic  
Or a battleground.

Your body  
Is a land  
Ruled by monarchy.  
Wear your crown.

I wish the anger would have come  
While you were touching me.  
While you were doing  
What no one told you you could –  
What no one – What /  
Did not tell you you could.

I wish the anger would have come  
Loudly,  
Abrasive to my enemies.

I wish I would have known  
They were my enemies  
Instead of hiding behind quietness  
And politeness  
And ignorance.

“Other people have it worse.”

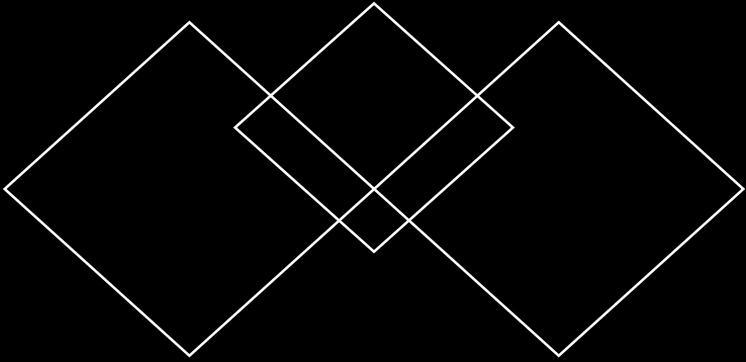
Would you compare  
An earthquake to a hurricane?

No.

If houses have fallen,  
they have fallen  
just the same.

*For all those who believe that what they have  
suffered does not matter – that what hurts them  
isn't serious enough to warrant help and love:*

*I want to tell you that you aren't taking away from  
someone else's traumas by getting help for your  
own.*



The Open

I once said

“I like the color gray because it makes the world seem [     ].”

I can't remember if I said  
[Bigger] or [Smaller] then.

I'll think about it.

Every tennis court I've ever been to has smelled the same.  
I wonder if all the people  
Are the same, too;  
Their scents washing off them like  
Light down from the sun  
And making the place  
Always smell like  
All of its brethren.

My favorite book  
Is a book about an alien  
And about how  
We are all different  
And I can never explain out loud  
*Why* that is my favorite book.

“Why” is my favorite question.  
It gets us places.  
“Why” is a ferry.  
“Why” is a bike with six gears.  
“Why” is the shortest sentence  
with the longest answer.

What do other people see  
When they look at the ocean?

A muse?  
A cool-down?  
A mystery?

What do I see  
When I look at the ocean?

Rhythm,  
and  
A thing to be feared,  
and  
Nourishing solitude,  
and  
A planetary characteristic.

Utterly  
Unfathomed  
Beauty  
To match  
The rings  
Of Saturn.

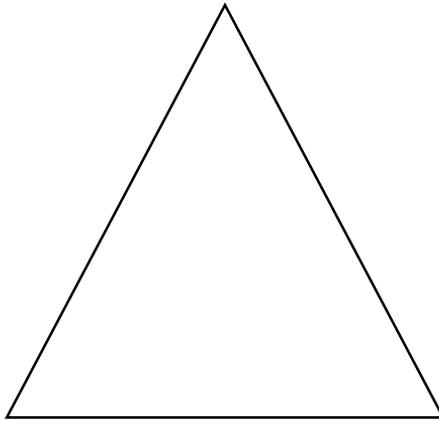
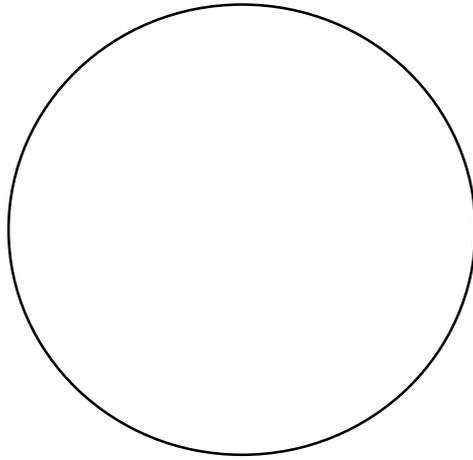
I like the color gray  
Because it makes the world seem smaller.

I don't think a lot of people can understand it,  
what gray means.

It stands for all the in-betweens, all  
the blacks and whites that don't exist

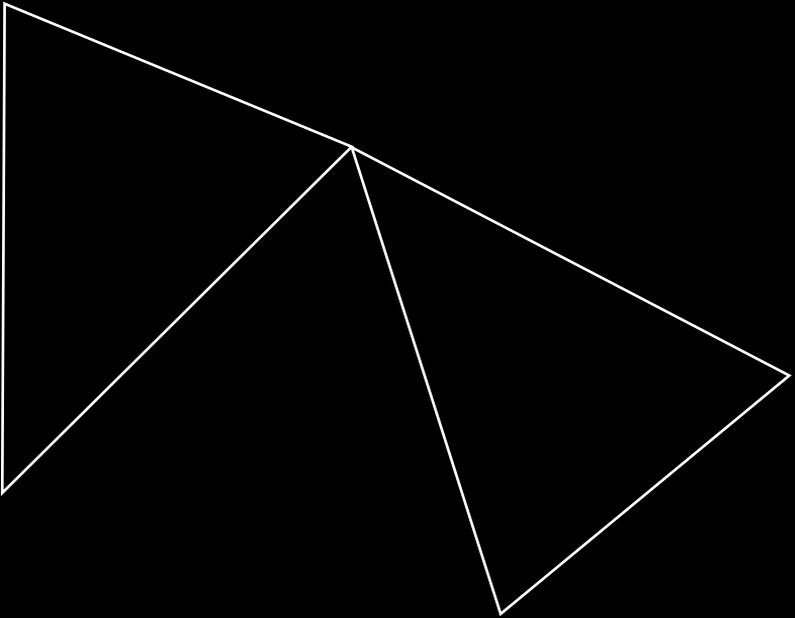
Pushed to the side because what we can't  
understand is ugly, because what won't fit

Can't, and there is no beauty in  
one lonely gray puzzle piece.



**The world is bigger than you  
You cannot balance it all  
On a singular point.**

The world isn't a black and white place  
But humans constantly try  
To clean-cut it  
To their understanding.



The Warrior

*inhale:* Be where  
*exhale:* your feet are

He has never seen  
The full range of my energy  
The spark  
And the dance in my step  
The light of my eyes  
from the depths.

What have I not seen of him?

Art  
Does not come  
Out of Tragedy

If it does  
What does that say of you who enjoy it?  
(sadists, masochists, dangerous romancers.)

I was an artist before any of it.  
I don't need to prove my art to you  
Or to anyone.

“Man things.”  
Don't give me that shit about man things.  
This is not grade school.  
You are not a selective club  
That we want to join  
To appease your ego.  
No.  
Man things? Lady things?  
No.  
They are things,  
                  distractions,  
                  nuances:  
You use yours  
To escape  
As do we.  
Only: we escape from you  
While you escape from yourselves.

Do not –

*EVER* –

Quote evolution against me.

Do NOT use

Things I study – MY expertise –

To talk me down,

To calm me: Even if your concept is correct

Because

Evolution is

Deep

Flawed

Unintelligent

Undesigned.

I am half of those things and working to understand the other two.

Do not try to use my science against my emotion.

When I used to see  
Jersey Girl stickers  
On bumpers and beach bags  
I'd think:  
*Why?*  
*Why would I want to tell the world*  
*That I'm proudly a girl?*  
*How can I be proud*  
*that I'm a girl?*  
*How can I flaunt flowers -*  
*How can I be proud of my*

*One*  
*Ultimate*  
*Weakness?*

But  
Now,  
When I see those shiny pink  
Jersey girl stickers,  
I think about -  
Being a girl  
And how that is synonymous with  
Having double-strength  
Because I can bring you into this world  
And  
I can  
Mercilessly  
Take you  
Back  
Out of it.



## NECROPHILIA

Sure  
You can not eat  
And maybe  
You won't be bloated  
Or maybe  
You'll die  
(eventually.)  
Why do They  
Push you to starve  
If you'll die?  
Because  
You can't fight  
If you're  
Dead and gone.

June  
Will be my first new-clean month.

This I promise myself.  
I will wreath  
This new body  
In lovely bright flowers  
And fill  
This plush belly  
With laughter  
Instead of breaking it down  
Punishing it  
For what it won't do  
When I should be bowing down to it  
For all it does.

I can do this.  
June.

What if I break  
This promise to myself?  
Then I will make  
A new promise  
With each  
And every  
Sunrise.

I love science because science is magic with an explanation.

Magic isn't always abracabra, wands flashing, sparks flying. Magic is that moment when the craving for more knowledge is satisfied. Magic is how some of the most wonderful things in the universe seem to be disordered mistakes. Magic is the things that are there, fathomable, but out of our control.

- My inkous veins
- take purple plunges down my hands
- and I can feel the *thethump, thethump, thethump*  
of lifeblood pentameter
- The same beat  
that avalanches from my tongue  
when what is common  
stirs it

Never  
Did I think  
I would be jealous  
Of lovers of Floridian beaches  
Of six-year relationships  
Of softness  
But now that I am softer,  
I am stronger.  
I would not trade  
The power in my guts  
The prowess on my tongue  
The selective sweetness of my lips  
Like salt against chosen sores  
For all the world's  
Hardened successes.

The weakest bit of my armor  
Used to be  
The breastplate  
So that I would cover it  
With tape and bandages  
To hide  
To protect myself

Now  
I am a castle  
Fortified and proud of every “weakness”

There are so many  
Wonderful castles  
With ivy on their walls  
And crumbles in the cobbling

Now  
I am a castle  
There is no moat:

With the right knock  
And an offering  
I will let you in.

You cannot spell  
LIFE  
without  
/  
and  
*If*  
Because your life  
Is about you  
And your choices.

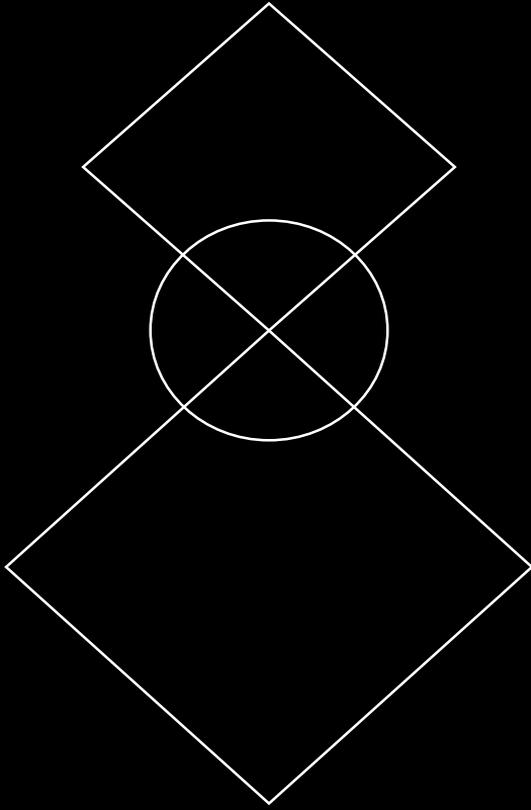
if  
my words were my hands  
I would use them  
To shake your shoulders and say,  
*Do it.*  
*Do not*  
*let fear*  
*rule you.*

## GODDESS OF CHANGE

This is how it starts,  
The revolution  
To war.  
Softness in the trenches,  
revenge in the gallows.  
Woman with roses in her hair,  
Roses without thorns,  
Without thorns.  
Swift scythe, she lays you down  
You who try to harden her.  
She'll come for you,  
She'll come for you.  
Proud eyes of fire  
Looking on the world she'll bear.

This is it,

The revolution.



## The Goddess

i will catch you  
the way the water catches light  
not to hold but to brighten  
not to hold but to brighten

As the sky  
Holds the sun:  
So will I  
Hold you.

## EDEN

Two heads on the same flower  
Together, we are twice as beautiful

**Throw a rock in a valley,  
You'll hit something I love.**

What does it mean  
To be in love?  
I don't know –  
But I'm learning  
With each new relationship:  
I don't love  
All those  
That I said I did.  
Twice, it's been real.  
Twice, it's held true.  
I don't know –  
But I'm learning  
That when I love someone  
It never really goes away.  
Like an ocean in winter  
It is empty, cold  
But still a beautiful thing to behold.

Someone I [ ]  
Gave me,  
For Valentine's Day,  
A jar.  
A jar of things he like[] about me.  
That  
Was one of the best gifts  
I have ever received –  
Because –  
It wasn't my hair.  
It wasn't my eyes.  
It wasn't my curves,  
                    skin,  
                    laugh,  
It wasn't superficial.  
It was my ways.  
My energy.  
Things of all sizes  
That make me, me  
And not any gorgeous dark-eyes  
girl with boobs, a butt, and freckles.

We should all  
Make such jars for ourselves.  
I have one – in my head –  
All the things I love about me.  
The things  
I hope others  
Notice.

There are two ways  
To get old

1.  
Let the  
Life  
get sucked  
out  
from your  
Soul

2.  
spend  
the currency  
of your energy  
Wisely.

I want to make magic  
with You  
I can do it with others  
I can wave the wand  
All I need is myself  
But  
I want to make magic  
with You.

Falling in love  
Is usually scary for me  
Like falling off a precipice  
Into dark water I can't control

But this  
Is like falling  
From a calm, dark tunnel  
Into clouds.

Purple petals  
Where fairies brush their hair  
And mount their bee-steeds  
Atop a mound of mulch  
Where the bugs play  
A metropolis  
Of mystics and their wares  
Bright in the light, and soft in the night.

## TULIP

Flowers  
Are small, silent  
Goddesses.  
Opening  
To receive the sun  
Falling  
Over themselves  
in delicate-seeming folds  
that are actually  
Weather-strong.  
Formed beautifully,  
Crafted  
in the palms  
of Mother Nature  
herself.

## MANTIS

Beauty comes in the places you don't look for it  
In the privacy of elevators  
When one hand reaches out to another  
In an ugly place.

## FIREPLACE

Sometimes  
Things we fear  
Become the things we warm up to  
When we catch them in the right place  
Bring them into our homes  
and breathe air into them  
As they keep us from the cold

I am of as much use and love  
To my fireplace  
As my fireplace is to me.

*the math of differences:*

imagine  
this book  
at the center  
of a circle  
of influence.

imagine  
your words and actions  
at the center  
of a circle  
of influence.

They are one  
Affecting tens  
Affecting hundreds  
Affecting thousands.

Think  
of one word,  
some word.  
Change just  
One letter  
You have changed  
The entire word.

I  
Am becoming  
Everything  
That I ever wanted  
To be.  
So can you.



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To all the worlds' poets. Use your words.