

1. Lips

Maybe, just maybe, our lips are pink
because of all of the years of drinking tea and eating raspberries
And maybe, just maybe, our eyes are brown
because of hours spent looking into the forest
and maybe, just maybe, we cry tears
because the rivers and seas that we watch flow
are trapped inside of us until they are ready to come out

2. The Boring Man Next Door

There is this little gold key
That a stranger once gave to me
And when I asked him what it was for
He told me to wait and see

I tried it everywhere – in mailboxes and in doors
I tried it after hours on the country convenience store
I tried it on the windows and the teacher's desk at school
I tried it on the lockers at the local swimming pool

“This little golden key,” he said
“opens up a treasure”
Artists and dreamers alike
Have never felt such a pleasure

He told me that he's been waiting
To pass this on for so long
“someone must keep it alive –
Even after I am gone.”

Keep it alive? I thought,
What can this treasure be?
A thousand dollars in stacks?
Dozens of boats in a fleet?

A few weeks have gone by
And still I am not sure
Why me? Why now? And
What is this little key for?

Then, one day, I saw it
An ad in the paper
A picture of the old man
Turns out he was my neighbor

The key – I thought – this is it
I must enter his old house
So I walked up the manicured lawn
Quiet as a mouse

He is survived by no one
Read the obituary
A John Doe of sorts
Who died in February

Slowly, and with hesitancy
I turned the silver knob
I pushed open the heavy door
Proud of my secretive job

Across the room was an entrance
With a small, golden cavity
It has the same shape and size
As my little golden key

What lay behind the door
Was not what I expected
No yachts or golden bars
As my boring imagination suspected

This briefcase-clad business man
With old, leathery skin
Left behind a legacy
That I will soon participate in

A banker or a lawyer
Is what my parents always thought
Of the quiet old man next door
But they never thought to knock

Rows and shelves of paint jars
With the crusty paint outside
Yellows and reds and blues
And every shade of a blushing bride

Green ribbons and beads and baskets
Of multicolored pastels
Lined every inch of shelving
Until the walls ran out

Rocks and stones of purple
Line the smooth floor below
Color was bursting everywhere
My eyes didn't know where to go

Buttons and doorknobs and glitter
And stoneware pottery
I thought this man was a notary
How did this art room come to be?

With a small, wise mind I realized
Why I was chosen
He chose my naïve mind
Because it is still growing

“you must not judge your neighbor,”
I can almost hear him today.
“No matter what they appear to be,
You do not have the final say.”

I must go share this news
About this recently departed
He was no stuffy old man
But a colorful, full-of-life artist.

3. Poetry with a capital "P"

I write Poetry
I write it often
And I write it hard

But I cannot force it
No, Poetry cannot be forced

It comes to me, I don't come to it
It's an unexpected guest knocking at the door
There was no cardstock invitation
No forgotten RSVP

The urge hits me the way that I imagine
An animal instinctively hunts
My mind is taken over
Poetry is winning the war inside

I write Poetry, not to make myself feel better or practice self-care
I write Poetry because my thoughts turn from an intangible idea, to liquid
As it seeps from my eyes, my brain, down my neck, through my arms
All the way down to my fingers

Poetry does not stop at my fingertips, though
It turns into a liquid idea that forces my body to lunge forward
As if wind pushed my back
Anything – a pen, crayon, make up, juice from my blueberries at work
Anything to let Poetry out of its cage

Sometimes, Poetry and I cannot find what it wants
There's sometimes no pen in sight
Poetry usually understands
It doesn't get angry with me

When this happens, sometimes the idea in my head slips away
The same way that smoke slips away after blowing out birthday candles
You can catch a glimpse of it, and then it floats out of sight
That's when I realize that the moment is over
That feeling – those words
Will never exist the way they once did in my head

The forgiving thing about Poetry, though,
Is that it always comes back
No matter how many times I ignore it,
Poetry always comes back.
Even if I consciously send it away,
Poetry always knocks, unannounced, yet again.

It must be easy for Poetry, since it already lives inside of me
Since it is a guest that is always there
Well, then, maybe Poetry isn't a guest after all
Maybe Poetry is me

4. The injection

If your memory was erased tomorrow
And you were allowed a few things to keep
Which memories would you choose?
That you could think about before you sleep?

“you have certain categories,” they told us
As they got the injections ready
“love and food and family, pets and friends and school,
Now hold on and keep your arm steady.”

“Quick, ok, which ones do I keep?
The meal at Christmas time, pasta and buttered rolls,
My dog max and his little furry feet?
My best friends from childhood
Who helped me not unfold?
My education opportunity of studying in Greece?
My mom, dad and brother at the dining room table?

But as for love, I cannot say, there is no memory
There are instances of fire that have helped me to become me
The most unfair thing is choosing one to keep

There were late nights in a familiar basement with the walls painted red
There was silence as we laid down on a black, starlit beach
There were laughs and tears in a car with foggy planes of glass
Absolutely not one memory can be lost to the past.”

I looked up in fear as I finished my secret speech
There were tears in the nurse’s eyes as she pretended to inject me
“run quickly,” she whispered, without skipping a beat,
“get out of here and make sure that no one sees.”

I stood up quickly and ran out of that room
With my arm bandaged tight
I couldn’t feel a thing that changed
I lost no memories that night

I saw the empty faces
Their withdrawn eyes go blank
I remember my entire life
And have that nurse to thank

After thirty years I thought,
“Did I make the right decision?”
Everyone else grew up
With a brand new set of vision

Whenever I would wonder
If I’d be happy if I was them
I shake my head every time
And remember love back then