

Broken:

A Collection of Poems

Fingers

I pick and chew
my nails
and the skin on my fingers.
I've done it my whole life.

My piano teacher
Mrs. Murphy
said my hands
were unladylike.

My ballet teacher
whose name I forgot
smacked my hand
right out of my mouth.

I forgot myself
and gnawed a hole
right through
the middle of my thumb.

My nail warped

and developed
deep rounded grooves
like waves on a lake.

The bug-eyed blonde
gas station clerk
stared
when I paid cash for my Camels.

He asked what the hell
happened to my hand.
He smelled like warm bologna.
Or maybe that was the whole place.

I said I slammed
my finger
in a car door
because that would be accidental.

My mom
tried bitter apple polish.
I developed a taste
for sour candy.

“Sit on your hands!”

“You’ll get an infection!”

“You’ll catch a disease!”

“That looks terrible!”

Picking and chewing

is my safety.

This is my comfortable bubble.

My fingers are my soft secret.

My hands go everywhere

with me.

I’m already equipped

to handle anything.

I have ten fingers

and ten nails

with miles of skin

and it always grows back.

I have an unending supply

of solace

built into

my body.

I have my hands.

in a crowded bar

or bustling shopping center

or a meeting of great importance.

It's loud and uncomfortable.

Everyone rushes around.

But I am safe.

I have an escape.

I reconnect

to my body

no matter how far

I am pulled away.

When I saw

blood on my thumb

dried and dark

I was shocked.

I don't mean to

do this to myself.

I require it

like an addict needs dope.

I am flawed.

I am not perfect.

I am not beautiful.

My hands are a mess.

I have daddy issues

and anxiety

and depression

and my fingers.

Pink Soap

In the tiny tile shower
my skin is attacked
by an unforgettable
scalding spray.

I fixate on the plastic tub
filled with pink liquid soap.
It is bolted to the wall
like a motel TV.

I am an
unreliable guest
in this world.
I cannot be trusted.

On suicide watch
I am only allowed
viscous substances
dispensed in measured doses.

I might hurt myself

with a bar of soap.

That's ridiculous.

Those are the rules.

The color looks fragrant

like a field of flowers.

But it smells like sterile

hospital cleaning chemicals.

I am messy.

I am dirty.

I am untrustworthy.

I broke the rules.

The soap is the color

of the pink carnations

that symbolize a mother's

undying love.

My mother loves me.

My mother didn't want me to die.

I betrayed her

the same way my father did.

My father was here
fifteen years ago
for swallowing
too many pills.

The mermaid called.

We both followed.

But I am standing in water
and he drowned.