

Living on the Sidelines: A Collection of Poems

By Alia Govin-Fowler

on being the first queer friend

I took music instead of classics and my poetry paid the price.
I roll my eyes and insert my secrets into notebook margins and google docs
but I can't write the way the girls that rejected me do.
What I can do is draw diagrams of the feminine form in the back of extension maths.
I can laugh in the faces of boys I dated in year nine.
(I can delight in being the one to let them know.)
I can answer uncomfortable questions in the P.E. weights room.
I can teach you the words you'll call your own in a year or so.
I can send my stanzas to the girls who write better.
I can read the ones they wrote about the girls who came after.
I can show the ropes to anyone who asks.
I can watch them all do it better.

Girls!

I love you when you want me! I shine when you look my way!

Would you mind appearing in my self-indulgent sentences sometime?
Are you free Sunday? Do you have some spare space this year I could fill?

You could rest in my oesophagus sometime!
You could take a little breath off my hands.
(I could grow hungry as you eat me whole.)

No worries if not! Let me know whenever!

Dislocated

You will find the lost girls in all the places you expect them to be.
They are in the library, searching through spines for the last time they felt good crying. They are in a good friend's kitchen, eating pavlova alone. They are making gingerbread in spring. Again.
They are out in the town taking photos of the people they love for no reason. They are admiring the work of the found, almost always. They are sewing themselves into their skirt hems.
They are hiding in your jean drawer. They are writing the poetry they will grow to hate. They are picking their skin.
They are just next door.

Hungry

All I do these days is eat and eat and eat and eat.
I gorge myself on more beauty made by any other hands than mine.
The screen is my plate and it is always full.
I cry and laugh and come back for seconds.
The urge to create shrinks down my spine as my eyes grow tired.
I go to bed with an empty page and a full stomach of content.

Every once in a while the hunger takes another shape.
There is someone across the bar and they are real and my eyes want to stay there.
I take my first hit of a cigarette from theirs and I wonder
if I will begin to crave this particular vice.
The nicotine doesn't linger but the memory does,
of fingers briefly grazing and eye contact barely held.
How humiliating. To be daydreaming about half an interaction,
another fragmented moment for queer collection.

What if I was in love? What then?
What if I kissed and touched and wrote poems that were never embarrassing and always
true?
I could be an artist if they made one of me.
I would love to be delicious sometime soon. I would love for them to indulge in me.

Let me make something good! Just this once!
Give me clay and paint and dirt and skin to hold onto.
My chest is filling with words that beg to be sautéed fast and served fresh.
I am painting paragraphs across the inside of my skull and leaving them there to dry.
I am taking film photos from the same corner of my street and forgetting to develop the roll.
I am peeling myself away from my phone by force.

Everyone I meet is living and doing and loving and all I am is hungry.
I am thinking about writing again; somebody set the table.