

# THE QUARRY

‘The Poet: an Abecedarian Poem’

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*This poem is an excerpt from my young adult verse-novel, *The Notebook of Teagan Trace*, which I am writing in a multitude of poetic forms. An abecedarian poem is an acrostic form that begins each line with successive letters of the alphabet.*

## **The Poet: an Abecedarian Poem**

another day

another hour

another step towards closing my family’s bookstore forever

antsy with a feeling like sadness

antsy with feelings I don’t understand

attempting to numb myself with work

biting my lower lip until I taste blood

blinking back tears as I pull apart the shelves

books of biographies

books of play scripts

books of poetry

books that I've looked at everyday, familiar as family

boxing away years of memory

caffeinated on too many cappuccinos, Mom bounces round the shop

clearing the rusty filing cabinet

clearing the non-fiction shelves

clearing the textbooks

cloaking the *SALE! EVERYTHING 25-75% OFF* sign with a new one that says

closing

closing

closing

Dad hiding out in the back office

dazed expression on his face as he stares into his screensaver

*Depressed*, Mom whispers as she zips past me

dictionary definition: dejected, despairing, despondent, dismal, distressed

door bell jingles, but no one goes to see but me

dressed in sleek black pants and a red v-neck top, a woman a little younger

than Mom enters the shop

each arm adorned with wooden bangles

ebony hair pulled back into a bun

eyes meeting mine, she smiles

*Finally found you*, she says. *I've heard you're one of the few bookshops that  
still stocks poetry. But I'm sorry to see you're closing*

fingers fumbling at my sides, I tell her in a

flat-toned voice how all books are 75%, for her to let me know if she needs

any help

folding her hands, she says she's  
foraging for one book in particular

*Forgetting: A History*, a book of poems by Zara Valentine

*Frivolous of me, really*, she says. *I gave too many away when it first came out,  
and now I only have a few left*

*Funny how you never think of your first book going out of print*

goggle-eyed, I stare at her – she's the author?  
goose pimples creeping up my arms because I've never met a published  
poet before

gradually I get a grip  
guide her to the poetry section

hastily, I thumb through what's left on the shelf – H, I, J, K  
head not working, I skip through V straight to Z  
heat on my cheeks as I hunt through the stack

*Here*, I say, handing her the shiny black book, edges bent  
hibiscus flowers decorating the front cover

holding the book to her chest, she breathes out. *Thank you*  
*How wonderful*

I am not able to stand it anymore, and I blurt out, *So you're the poet who  
wrote this?*

*I am*, she says, *I'm Zara*

I am fumbling now, a million questions spluttering out

I ask her how she first got published  
I ask her how she started writing  
I ask her if she always wanted to be a poet  
I ask her if she keeps a notebook  
I ask her where her books sell, since big chains don't stock much poetry,  
and independents like ours are closing down  
I ask her why, when, how she got published when poetry's considered dead,  
dead, dead

I even start telling her about my own notebook, how I'm always scribbling  
poems and poem-like words and things like cinquains and acrostics  
I say I'm sure my poems aren't as good as hers

in the background, Mom flits around the shop, giving me eyes to come help,  
but I ignore her

*Inexpressible reasons why I started to write*, Zara says, telling me about the  
influence of English teachers, her insatiable appetite for books, her mother dying  
when she was eight, giving her the constant itch to create  
initially working as a secretary, writing poems in the hours after work  
innate feeling that poetry is what she should do, money or no money, sent her  
first manuscript to fifty-one publishers before she got a yes from a small  
publishing house, Metaphor  
inner strengthening when Metaphor filed for bankruptcy just months after they  
published *Forgetting*  
inspired by her dad to keep writing, who told her not to listen to people who  
said writing poetry was useless  
involved in writing a sixth book now

*It's great to hear you write*, Zara says, *Do you have any poetry here I could  
read? And tell me, what was your name?*

jack-in-the-box in my chest, I tell her Teagan, Teagan Trace  
jittery legs

jumpy

knowing my notebook's on the floor beside me

lapse of time before I reach down and pick it up  
leaking sweat as I hand it to her

letting Zara leaf through my notebook  
letting Zara – someone I *just* met – read poems I haven't even shown my best friend  
or my parents

looking at her face as she reads  
looking hard at every blink and lip twitch, wondering what it means

lunacy

millions of moments march by before Zara looks up  
mouth moving slow motion, she says, *Your poems are strong, Teagan.*  
*They've got great energy.*  
*Must say, I think your cinquain sequence is my favourite*

nervously, I start to say that my poems aren't that good, they're just silly things  
I write to pass the time  
neurons neurotically fluttering, I realize I sound just like my grandma

now she locks her gaze on me  
now Zara asks, *Have you ever thought of making poetry your career?*

o yes I've thought of it  
of getting books published  
of spending every day writing at a desk

only I have always thought I had to be something else – a lawyer, a stockbroker,  
a dentist

only I think of Grandma saying poetry's dead  
only I'm packing away books in my family's shop that's closing down

ooh but my heart sings yes, yes, yes  
outlandish to think of doing anything else

palimpsest of my heart  
palpable  
pervasive

poetry

quaky-legged, I ask Zara, *But how do you make money?*

*Quite a few people still read poetry, you know,* she says with a wink

really honestly, though, Zara admits that she  
receives little recompense for her work  
rectified her finances for awhile by waitressing part-time  
reduced her spending  
resolved her situation by starting a small online business, so now  
she can write all day and fiddle with her business at night  
*Risky?* she says. *Perhaps. But I know I wouldn't be happy if I couldn't write*

she tells me I can do this, too  
she tells me I should follow my gut  
she tells me not to listen to people who say poetry's dead

somewhere behind us, Mom shouts my name

*Think you better go,* Zara says

throat closing up, I nod  
together Zara and I wander towards the door

tongue-tied

topple-toed

tripping over my words, I tell her not to worry about paying for her book

unexpectedly, she says, *I'd actually like you to have it. And here...*

unfastening her purse, she digs out her card

urging it into my hands with the book

verbal functions no longer working

verging (stupidly) on the point of tears

*Very nice of you*, I splutter, *thank you*

*Where are you, Teagan?* Mom calls

whirling around to go, Zara says, *Keep writing!*

writing

writing

writing

writing already in my head

writing poems

writing poems

writing Zara an email: *I can't say how much I loved meeting you*

xoxo

yelling to Mom that I'm coming

Zara's words

zigzagging

zipping

zooming as I go