



*Cleaning  
Up After  
the  
Pool  
Party*

Story Storage

This is a chapbook of poetry. It also includes one short essay and one microfiction story.

The chapbook centers around a fictional character named Dry - he hosts a summer pool party but has conflicting feelings about doing that. The book will explore those feelings as Dry interacts with people at the party. It's a character study first and a narrative second.

I have written before about parties with [similar vibes](#). This will be a sort of extension/reconsideration/deconstruction of that vibe (as in, more context for Dry's emotions but less benefit of the doubt that his emotions are healthy).

I have also [written before about water](#) as this type of psychological metaphor.

**Content warning** - this book depicts the following sensitive topics:

- Body hatred
- Disordered eating
- Body horror
- Alcohol use
- Tobacco use (smoking)
- Injury with glass

**This is a work of poetic fiction.** The characters, setting, and events are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, settings, or pool parties the author has been to is a coincidence. Opinions expressed belong to the fictional characters, not the author.

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# Gate

Dry: the boy who hates water  
but hates insistent sweat more.

A slice of cheese  
stretches

into Dry breakfast.

Backyard interrupted by  
pool — both might as well reach into  
desert.

Summer house hides from its summer  
until friends Dry doesn't know trade  
their own houses for a day's worth of water.

Squeaky and see-through.

A party begins with a laugh and the first  
unlocked  
gate.

## Buoyant Botany

Desert plants around the pool are cursed with gluttony,  
welcomed to an abundance that they will  
never know unless they are waterlogged.

Leaves and stems are sogged.  
Petals and buds have more than their fill.  
Feathers and entire flowers wish for their lily  
cousins to take their place.

An impression on the surface dropped from the sill  
with clarity. Drops on the window evaporate - a final fog  
lost to sunshine and pool ripple. Floating here is an impermanent plea  
from the dead, too dry to accept a strange grace.

## Ducks and Pucks (essay)

The correct amount to know about chlorine is nothing. If you know anything about chlorine, that's probably because chlorine has been in your hair. You've been in a community pool where it's caked onto you. Or you've been in your backyard. When you dunk your head under the water, chlorine stings your face. It attacks your eyes. It infests your nose.

If you know anything more about chlorine, that's probably because it's a chemical. It's a gas that kills people in large amounts. Chlorine was used as [a weapon during the First World War](#). It wasn't [the only gas weapon from that war](#), but it is one that stuck in the popular imagination, especially because of the [art](#) depicting its use.

And if you know more than that, you take care of a pool.

At that point, you know that chlorine is remarkably brittle. You hold a puck of it the size of your palm, and it coats your hands like chalk. If you're lucky, you get a bucket of individually plastic-wrapped pucks. You can unwrap them one at a time and squeeze them right into the chlorinator without making too much of a mess on your hands. The smell doesn't go away unless you wash it away. You can dunk your hands in the pool and get rid of most of the smell. You will eventually want soap and a sink.

If you're not lucky, the giant floating plastic duck on top of the chlorinator is cracked apart, dry from days in the summer sun. When you hold its head, you have to tuck the rest of the tube into your armpit and wrench the duck with your other hand. The heat sticks it in place. Then you twist the duck two times, three times before it moves free of the chlorinator. After practice, you will only get one blister on your palm.

You know that the chlorinator extends to fit twice as many pucks as you'll ever give it. It can collapse to fit the amount you prefer, but it has small fins on the inside that fit into slots so it can extend and let the chlorine dissolve. The tube extends when you open it, and when you set it on the section of wall between the pool and the pump timers to grab the pucks, the chlorinator collapses back into itself. It doesn't always fall off the wall.

You smell chlorine when you open the plastic chest next to the pump timers. When you forget to close the plastic chest before it rains, and you have not yet bought individually wrapped pucks, the chlorine cakes this part of the deck for years.

You press the stubborn button on the bucket of pucks until it gives - or your fingers do. You hold a puck of chlorine. It coats your hands. You certainly don't want to [keep it on](#)

[your skin for a long time](#), so you rinse your hands in the pool water and then wash your hands again with soap in the garage sink.

You fill the chlorinator, twist the duck back onto the top, and throw it far away back into the pool. Dry just drops it where he stands. No drops reach his skin.

Dry will probably be fine if he doesn't breathe it in, eat it, or drink so much pool water that he drowns. At that point, he has bigger problems. In a week, that puck will dissolve. The pool will be less infected than it was. A duck floats on the surface and [contains nothing](#) below that.

## Dove Strut, Morning

Morning:

Every motion is full-body.

The head leads

    feet leads

        torso leads

            wings into the air

A step is a possibility toward flight or more steps. With wet-enough, quick-enough feet, even the people don't feel the cool deck as they find their way towards the pool, with a strut they mistake for stride and failing flight

## Portrait of the Youngest Guy Here

He lost his keys on the opposite side of his apartment door.

His roommate won't get home from work  
until a good day is gone again. The sun knows  
every mistake he has ever made.

There's no use reminding him,  
or kicking him out even more.

When he arrives, the cooler is still empty.  
So now Dry digs into the refrigerator,  
finds an abandoned hard seltzer,  
pours the guy a drink on the rocks and in a puddle.

So now, the guy takes his shoes and socks off,  
and puts them far from the water when he jumps in. He's the first  
who will end the day with a towel in his hand.  
No one here will let him go home with wet clothes.

## Dead Man's Float

Phones don't float, but they will be okay —

*Reach*

or, like dead men in deep water, they know they will come back to the surface  
one way or another

*Throw*

A scramble for hands and arms and nets and breath. Not the last of the night.

*Row*

Folding under, staying put. Just another way to barter against an anchor  
already on its way down.

## Cooler Full of Melted Ice

Thin latch keeping cold with could  
staring out at far-away processions,  
can already decompressed, bottle already shattered,  
all sunshine painted blue,

    chilling blood

    forcing muscles apart

    nausea of the limbs

Box holding onto crumbling "is"

    collapsing "was"

    thawing "will be"

Splash of ice with desperate turn back to  
a dripping tongue

No thanks.

Maybe later.

Dry just ate.

# Pumice

Clouds of brown dirt and bright green algae swirl along the stone-scoured steps.

A small net skims leaves and wayward ants from tile to tile. Bubbles break through the rock as it remembers a long-lost lava. Calderas for the sand. Even the desert's blessings need a cleanup. The stone scratches palms just as well as ceramic. A splash of beer drips towards the water before breaking into any spongy place it can make itself feel welcome as it falls.

Two minutes in this heat, two or three good shakes and no one would ever know

the chunk of rock ever had a new name.

# Cannonball Scorekeeping

No points for guess

Fewer points for hesitation

Call

We measure in splash

    Raise higher

        Fold mid-jump

(sorry you have to see that)

Five bucks if you get Dry

Flop

    Turn (as many times as you can)

        Pool

## Hand-stitching towels

Dry's eternal later draped across  
the gate, display of tight sewing,  
microfiber and rage only kept  
together in thread(t)

Clay feet dried hard in the sun  
More crumbs caught between stitches  
A tight knit, waiting for water he  
will not offer, spills out what everyone else  
can afford to waste, sick of knowing there are favors  
the man will not return.

## Sweat on the Inflatable Raft

Dry lays out, a weathered baseball cap draped across cheeks that never knew salt, chain-link clatter, or scattering dust, becalmed - adrift without a guiding sail, true.

Seasick still.

Muscles tensed to stay above the water.

He imagines relaxing.

Trapezius balance. Tether resisting the float. Desperation comes in.

Attempt, afloat, a falling in and turning just before a splash. He dips his hands in the water. An escape back to back.

No one else sees, but a boy loses his name for the first time.

## Creepy-Crawly Piety

Difficult to bless you  
when you meander across trail with rattle  
tubes and creases

Difficult to hug you  
when you hug walls with flapping  
fins, when you eat bubbles and gardens

Difficult to dodge you  
When jets push stragglers from the steps

# Potato Chip Crumble

Three methods for

moving stagnant bodies:

push forward from,

pull toward into,

slippery flip-----flops.

Summoned courage lost

sure steady ground

greasy napkin salt

stuck slipping splash

## Dry falls into the pool

The boy expends all summoned  
courage and all air from his lungs. When he hits the concrete  
floor, sunset fills the water.

Ten thousand tasks to approach stillness.  
Holding breath  
Feeling heartbeat in his water-logged ears  
His neck tenses  
His chest tightens  
His torso collapses into itself  
His back stretches  
Anything to have and keep that air, that heartbeat lost  
like a careless name

Ten thousand arms haul Dry to the sky with a clumsy pull.  
Any hiding mercy is gone. Only pool water  
covers his skin. Cruel boy collapsing.  
A simple truth all ten thousand arms know:  
Even if he had to fall,  
he could have fallen hours ago.  
Sweat and desert heat drain from his face.  
His lips shake and the pool gets deeper.

## Icarus of the Afternoon

Pool, can you keep the sun away  
as a boy touches one and falls to the other,  
wings crafted by pathetic hands  
best known for hiding forsaken monsters?

What else could you expect, boy?  
That call to feel sunshine in your hands  
offers no mercy if you hesitate.  
Water, sun, air. None are yours. Take a breath.  
Then give it back.

## Treading Water Ghazal

Long, plenty of room for a perimeter pace  
and not deep enough to force anything besides that pace.

Nineties parent body, not grand but ground  
and growing into (out of) cement with breathless pace

The guys circle the center drain, surface to stomach or waist,  
now finding shoulders submerged by dragging rubber weight, pace

rising as gasping heads gulp air, lost in a laugh  
tossed to the next guy along with the weight, his heartbeat pace

slowed just enough by a breath from the gut up  
before falling back down, far from air, clumsy push to bubble pace

pulsing as he sinks, tight as his legs bent tight  
and he springs back with sogging, smiling face.

## Molten Cheese

Half-baked grip on twice-baked tortillas

won't hold up to the heat

sheet pan with corners split between shredded chicken,

crumbling beef, and collapsed refried beans

hand-mashed guacamole with diced onion and jalapeno

sour cream whipped up, seasoned with lime juice and garlic,

salsa fresca mixed in roasted corn.

Open swim asks at least one illusion against its vacancy. "No nachos, no mess."

## Unfortunately, You Will Have To Do More Than Swim Out Of This Problem

Your lips are chapped. You were born in this desert.

The mirage loves you all the same.

Get something to drink or lean back under the surface,  
nose plugged, eyes squeezed shut. You have done this before. do it again.

Push yourself out of the sunlight into the dark patch cast by the roof corner where the sun does not reach. Touch the edge of the pool. Feel the hot surface against your palms again so you are ready to get out if your feet are lost somewhere in the water.

Put on a hat. Cover yourself in a towel.

Cover yourself in water or the body of someone your friend knows.

Take slow deep breaths. Ask someone to get you a drink from the cooler.

Take a sip. Beg for wind. Take another sip. Stop. Sit down on the steps.

Stay put. Do not stand up until you are ready. Do not go back into the water until you are ready.

Press cool water to your forehead.

Your cheeks.

Your ears.

Your jaw.

The back of your neck.

Drink again. You will not leave here this way. More than one of us has lost their name. We do not need to stay.

## Cuba Libre Umbrella

Far-away palm trees

Rum from the back of the bottom shelf

A cube of frozen lime juice from the bottom of the freezer

Just enough soda to dye the ice from green to  
caramel

Sweet candy in rebellion against cinnamon regrets

Umbrella with flimsy paper like a trailing

windmill, desperate for a

reluctant island storm. Cute. Shot.

## Flip-Flop Dirt Tracks

Absolutely not. No wandering along the lawn.  
No garden cross-pollination or brickyard clay.

Leave behind fresh grass soil. Let crystal studs of sand stay  
on the far shores. Shake off shower suds onto the smooth tile. Haunt

any other place with toasts of plenty and cool and health.  
Not a single crushed lemon branch, no belching yawn.  
Nothing you won't stay to wash yourself.

## Brief Meditation on Lemon Juice (microfiction)

Here, of all places, Dry is slow and exact.

He walks along the laid brick, between the walkway to the pool and the side of the lawn. He doesn't walk on any of the petunias. When he dodges the gate held open by a heavy stray brick, he is out of spare walkway. Now, he is either smart enough to have shoes on or brave enough to take quick steps while the gravel digs into his skin.

Dry moves under the low branches that touch his head. He picks up a lemon from the gravel. He holds it in his hand, turns it over, over again. A rupture means the fruit is forsaken. A small bruise or a spot lets Dry toss the lemon onto the lawn. Even a lot of dirt will come out in the wash.

The fruit with broken rind disappears into the large black trash can at the side of the house. There are two fruits that Dry can salvage for every one that's broken. The good fruits that are okay enough go inside to the sink water for a rinse. If they're lucky enough to stay but not lucky enough to be clean already, they get a good scrub with a small brush. They sit to dry on a dark towel. Ten minutes pass in this heat.

Dry takes a dozen clean lemons for slicing and leaves the rest in a big covered bowl on the counter. He pulls the hand juicer, a large pitcher, and a small bowl from the overhead cabinet. He turns and squeezes as he turns them in the hand juicer. The pale yellow juice drips down through a mesh strainer, then another. Rind, seeds, and pulp all lose their way except for the clearer juice.

The pitcher fills with ice from the freezer until he can't touch the outside anymore.

When the lemon juice stains the small bowl to the top, he dumps it into the pitcher. Dry pulls open the lazy susan and turns just enough to find the jar of sugar. He unlatches it, scoops enough sugar out into a glass cup with a spoon, and fills the rest of the cup with tap water. Stir. Microwave for a few seconds. Stir again.

When the tap water isn't cloudy anymore, he dumps the syrup into the pitcher. He returns to the sink and refills the glass with water. Into the pitcher, until it is full. No more water, sugar, or lemon juice. Just lemonade.

It's good. Sort of. Could you make it sweeter?

## Rondo alla pizza

“what do you want on the pizza?”

Dry starts: All-meat            “roasted tomatoes”            “onions and peppers”  
 “pepperoni”            “Hawaiian”            “what about a Hawaiian pizza is actually  
 Hawaiian?”    “It has pineapple”            “it was literally made in Canada”            “it’s  
 tropical”            “just because Dry has a Hawaiian shirt on doesn’t mean we’re in Hawaii”  
                          “there are literally palm trees in the backyard”            “pepperoni and be  
 done with it”            “stuffed crust”            “yeah, I bet you would-” “shut up”  
                          “mushrooms”            “no, we don’t have much room left for any other toppings”  
    “just get another pizza.”    “two more.”            “Pepperoni!”  
 “I’m soo hungry.”    “You all better take these home! I swear I will hunt you down on  
 Venmo—”

## Toaster oven s'mores

Cool down already.

No one huddles around a toaster oven when heat already presses on their skin

Tray of warm crackers toasted on tinfoil

Marshmallow fluff whipped up

Chocolate chips melted to goo between crunchy finger-pinch crackers and airy expanse.

A simple platter.

Sugar hangs on the corner of a boy's mouth.

The party takes a sandwich,

    looking anywhere except the countertop.

Hands dig into the fridge for

extra chocolate sauce,

caramel,

whipped cream,

crushed cookies

Everyone fed and happy for a moment,

scraped up with soapy water onto the couches.

## Scare-Dove, Evening

Scare-dove, scare-pigeon. Water and machine, not straw and wood.

Dry doesn't know much about pigeons after hunting them for sixty nights. He learns early on that most of the hunt doesn't require aiming at a pigeon. The hunt does require spraying water at the eaves above the living room where pigeons might roost. They did roost in the eaves at least one night.

He knows to wait until after sunset, so on the off-chance that he does scare a pigeon, it flies off somewhere that is not his summer home for the night's roost. A few tablespoons of water is enough for a pigeon to rustle from its evening rest and fly off. A few seconds of effort and some almost careful aim is enough so doves don't stay overnight and grow to think the house is theirs.

## Tempered

Why now of all nows? Why does surprise attend  
the steady failing sunlight, when Dry crafts such  
meticulous defense onto attentive stragglers?

Now, when arms curled to stomach  
fail. When surprise is least welcome.

Why does glass fall to the floor when Dry is too drunk to care?

Crumbs cling to rubbery flip-flops. Instinct brings arms  
up to hug Dry's head and neck before a cold descent. If only the shoulder  
stings, bless the boy - bless the bottle. The rushing bathroom sink runs syrupy, and  
the boy loses his name again.

## Last Call; or Saint Augustine Does His Laundry

Broken washing machine holds water too eager for heaven,  
a gift into dark hideaway room with machines, recycling, plastic bag collections.  
No bucket is big enough - for impatient spilling shirts size: what Dry thinks he is,  
bundled pants slick with detergent. Abundant and abandoned. The boy hides from  
himself still, surrounded by overflowing foam. Covered in doors and anything that keeps  
rumbling avalanche away from the pool.  
Socks abate whatever they can against the swell. The machine wishes away gross  
stains, deters aching proximity with bitters.  
Wet clothes will not explain themselves. Doesn't everyone here already see Dry?  
No one goes home pool-crustled. The saint is never ready.

## Cleaning Up After the Pool Party

The dry boy finds the stranded phones, makes the wires run headfirst into the wall,  
loves the spills away from the patio, closes the screen against the bugs,  
skips and re-skips stones across the surface of the playlist, doesn't listen to any  
bouncing voices,  
gives a last blessing to the empty plastic cups, calls the last evening breeze to clear the  
sweetened drops of disguise,  
crushes empty cans, cycles the bottles,  
dumps the ice from the cooler, loves it away, too,  
adds a dozen pairs to his shoe collection,  
folds the table back into itself,  
stamps the cigarette that rolled just one stray glance short of the dry lawn,  
navigates wallets and keys back to pockets,  
swaps dirty ashtray for clean keys,  
dry-brushes the counters clean of rounded pizza and tortilla chip crumbs,  
wipes the love out of the sticky, foaming stains. Dry doesn't know anyone at his party.  
except the mess.

Sunset's rhetoric will move everyone from the water into towels,  
back into the warm, pink June. Everyone is soaked and true and happy.  
No worry. You're good. Drive safe. Dry will get the lights.

## Notes aka The Part Where I Explain All the Jokes

As mentioned, “Ducks and Pucks” describes the use of chemical weapons (like chlorine) during World War I and the use of chlorine tablets as a pool cleaner. The essay also references the 1920 Wilfred Owen poem “Dulce et Decorum Est” and chapter 11 of the Chinese philosopher Laozi’s classic book Tao Te Ching.

“Dead Man’s Float” references the water rescue mnemonic “reach, throw, row, go with support”.

“Cannonball Scorekeeping” borrows terminology from poker, specifically Texas Hold ‘Em.

“Sweat on the Inflatable Raft” references the trapezius muscle, which connects the neck, shoulders and upper back.

“Dry falls into the pool” mentions the number ten thousand, which comes from the colloquial use of the Greek word “myriad”.

“Icarus of the Afternoon” references the classical Greek myth of Icarus, the son of the genius inventor Daedalus. Father and son escape from a labyrinth by flight with artificial wings made of feathers and wax. Icarus flies too close to the sun, melting his wings mid-flight, and falls into the sea.

“Rondo alla pizza” references the music technique of a rondo, which repeats a pattern. One of the more famous uses of this technique is Mozart’s “Rondo alla turca”.

The “Scare-dove” duet of poems is a pun on a scarecrow.

“Last Call; or Saint Augustine Does His Laundry” refers to the Catholic story of Saint Augustine of Hippo approaching a child at the bank of a river. The child collects water from the river and pours it into a small hole dug on the bank. Augustine asks if the child expects the river to fit in the hole. The child takes on an angelic form, questioning if Augustine expects his human intellect to contain the heavenly mysteries.