



inkwell

a creative showcase
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from the advisor

lissa torres

There's some romance hovering around the image of a writer. We picture someone chin-in-hand gazing off into the distance, quill poised, waiting for the muse to descend and inspire. Or this more contemporary version—someone with a cup of coffee at a diner scribbling on the back of a receipt. Slightly mussed hair. Yes, and elbow patches for good measure. Tinker with the image however you wish. Add a pipe, or a dress from Modcloth with bright yellow tights. Yet almost always, when we picture a writer, don't we picture them, well, *alone*?

We think of writing as a solitary act, and in many ways it is. Yet my experiences as a writer and teacher insist that writing may be equally if not more a product and gesture of community. “Rhetoric” may not be a particularly glamorous thing to mention when we're thinking about something like poetry, and yet it reveals a very basic truth—that an act of communication (an essay, article, poem, photo, logo, painting, and so on) is *by* someone *for* someone. The reader *invites* the writer to the page and makes the whole venture possible from the simple premise that *someone could read this*.

I've found myself considering over and again the ways community has influenced the work showcased in this issue. Many of these pieces were written in classes, shared in clubs, edited in email exchanges. I've been blown away by the enthusiasm of my students in creative writing classes this year, but I've been especially thrilled at all the ways a writing community has sprung up *outside* the classroom via “Write! Club,” author visits and open mics, panels and dramatic readings.

When you build a community, energy is sparked. Momentum. *We aren't alone*. I imagine we write alongside others for the same reason people run marathons in herds. When you can look to your right or left and see someone else sweating and turning red and

yet somehow still going, you keep going too. Writing is *hard*. Forget about muses and inspiration. Writing is *labor*. It's hours of pulling half-formed ideas onto the page and then chiseling away at them, over and again until the final result is halfway decent. If we're lucky, we've found readers and fellow writers we count on to tell us to keep going, and where to cut, the lines that could be sharper, the places we're not pushing deeply enough. We've found people we can learn from and challenge us to be better.

Building community is labor too. Showing up is labor. Offering someone a careful critique—labor. It takes a certain kind of generosity to tell someone *send me your work*, and a certain kind of courage to send it. Yet that's what is happening here at Bethany among our students and alumni.

In this issue, the Bethany community joins the greater literary community in conversation. Karee Henrich echoes Joy Harjo in the act of remembering. Ethan Becker writes in consideration of a poem by Langston Hughes. Hannah Bockoven and Eleonore Mumme imagine themselves as Chekavian characters. But the pieces here also consider more broadly the many ways we connect to others. I think of Amber Murry grappling with her mother's story, Hannah Dosch honoring her father's selflessness, Ezekiel Grabau's mother asking him for a promise. As important as these familial connections are, Bockoven and Mumme's discovery and re-discovery of their own "third sister" also reminds us how sometimes we are blessed to stumble upon others who influence us and our labor and perhaps share it.

None of us are really alone in this, are we? This issue is a reflection, finally, of the shared labor of Bethany's creative community, and in reading this issue, you too are joining us. Many thanks to the *Inkwell* staff, who have generously given their time and effort to champion these writers and artists. I'm grateful to them, as I am to our contributors and to everyone who submitted work this year.

Lissa Torres
Inkwell faculty advisor

the clothes i wear

ezekiel grabau

I.

In high school, I wore only what I wanted to. Which was usually a soft cotton T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans. I never wore a belt. Not because I thought my pants would look cool sagging off my pudgy hips, but because I didn't need them. Every pair of jeans I had hugged my hips with the perfect amount of affection that they would not fall. Perhaps that was because I was overweight throughout most of high school, but I like to focus on the virtue of my pants never falling down. I would spring down the halls with little jumps and twirls like life was a musical and the whole time my jeans never sagged an inch. On one such occasion where I was stepping in time to the beat of some tune in my head, a few junior high boys who looked about ten years old stopped me in the hallway. They were laughing at me and asked what drugs I was on. It caught me a bit off guard, and I let loose a loud laugh. "None!" I said still smiling. "Why do I give you that impression?" The reply still haunts me, "Nobody that happy isn't on drugs."

II.

I found my sister smoking cigarettes outside Grandma's house when I was thirteen. Lora was sitting on the faded red front steps with tendrils of smoke curling around her. She was wearing a tank top and sweatpants, her usual outfit. I had never seen anyone smoking in real life before that, and there she was comfortable as could be smoking deep and long puffs of death scented nicotine. She told me not to tell Mom or Pa about the smoking, but didn't stop. Between drags, she told me how tired she was of hiding. I nodded my head as I stared at her. I have hated the smell of cigarette smoke ever since.

III.

I rode the bus throughout junior high. In the back of the bus the

older kids swore and talked about drugs and the younger kids laughed and repeated the words like they knew what they really meant. I usually sat in the front where the little kids talked about five decibels too loud about anything and everything on their mind. I would sink back into the brown plastic seats and pull up the hood of my gray sweatshirt. I used to pretend that it was a cloak of invisibility, and as long as I put my hood up no one would see me. Of course, it wasn't hard to believe since everyone ignored me on the bus. Apparently, being invisible is as simple as wearing a hoodie and not blurting out everything inside your head. So every bus ride, I sat alone and unnoticed reading a book or looking solemnly out the window, pretending I wasn't listening to everyone talking around me. I don't think they ever noticed whenever my lips would curve into a knowing grin or a troubled frown.

**being
invisible is
as simple
as wearing
a hoodie
and not
blurting out
everything
inside your
head**

IV.

There's a photo on my phone of a man in a drug rug striped red, gold, black, and green in the style of the Rastafari movement. But he took the oddity of the outfit further by wearing matching green sweatpants and green Converse with a black fanny pack strapped around his waist. In the photo, he's crouching beside two statues of frogs on a footbridge surrounded by luscious green fauna made possible by a recent rainfall. What really sells the wild ridiculousness of this man is the crazy grin that stretches from one corner of his cheek to the other and his tangled

mop of hair which has strands pointing in every imaginable direction. It was in Jacksonville, Florida during my brother's marathon when the picture was taken of me. My sister Lydia and I were waiting for him to complete the loop and return on his way to the finish line. In the meantime, she and I walked around a bit and discovered these two unexplainable frog statues. I insisted on having a photo taken, and then we returned to the race course where we gave awkward cheers as the other runners ran by.

At the street corner where we watched, a stressed out police officer was trying to keep traffic from getting onto the race course. He was explaining to a driver why he could not just drive in the other lane when a man with a crazy mop of hair wearing typical running shorts and a tank top came jogging past. He had just enough time to look at me, glance at the cop, then look back at me and say, "Don't tell that other guy, but I smoked a joint before running this race," while making a smoking gesture with his thumb and index finger. My sister and I were completely confused. "I think," I said smirking, "he thought that I was a stoner like him." My sister looked at me and immediately started laughing. "Well of course! You're wearing a literal drug rug and sweatpants!" We both laughed for a while, but as time went on it started to bother me. I wonder now if I had been wearing a T-shirt and jeans if he could have seen the same odd, wild joy in my eyes. Or if he would have just run past me seeing nothing but another guy no different from the rest.

V.

I usually like dressing up. The other day I stood in front of the mirror buttoning myself into a sky blue dress shirt before pulling up dark navy pants and slipping the suspenders over my shoulders. To finish off the outfit, I tied a blue double Windsor around my neck and slipped into a brown vest to match my winter boots. At first I basked in the matching shades of blue, but then I started seeing the flaws. Like many winters, I have gained weight which showed in the strained vest. Then I noticed that my shirt sleeves were rumpled because they were just a bit too long for my arms. On top of that my nice blue tie was slowly curling into curve under the pressure of the vest and even my dress shirt had a wrinkle stretching from one shoulder to the other. My well-thought-out outfit didn't quite fit right, and all of a sudden, I was overpowered with feelings of self-loathing. Words like fat, failure, and try-hard all swirled up into my consciousness from the places I buried them. That one moment colored my entire day in sadness and inadequacy.

I told myself that it was just clothes. I told myself that it didn't matter. But I found myself doubting. Do the clothes make the man?

VI.

My sophomore year of high school I was invited to a party by Zack Miller. He was pretty cool and very funny. My parents were worried. My mom was awake late every night praying for the safety of her alcoholic daughter. She made me promise that if there were any drugs there at all, I would come straight home. I promised believing full well there would not be. I parked on the street in front of the house where someone was hosting the party. It was in town, but Janesville is so small that the stars are just as visible in town as the country. I remember that when I strolled into the backyard where the fire pit was, I plopped down on the wet grass to stare at the stars. I stayed there despite a lot of the people giving me odd looks and asking why I was laying in the grass. "I am watching the stars," I would sigh. After a few minutes, they forgot about me and someone even tripped over me in my invisibility. I only got up when they tried to start the bonfire. It wasn't long after I brought the embers to life with some twigs and cardboard that Zack Miller arrived.

He climbed out of his truck with a covered cup in his hand. He made no attempts to hide the fact that it was beer. It wasn't a big deal. He sat down by the fire and took a couple of drinks with a little bit of the golden liquid dribbling to the ground every now and then. It was all so normal to everyone else. I told myself it was just one drink, that my parents didn't have to know, that even if there was more that I would not drink. I had the opportunity to be cool, to be someone different than who I always was. But I couldn't stop thinking of my sister and my mom. I had made a promise to my parents and to myself. So I left. I did it when Zack left the bonfire to use the bathroom and when I was certain no one would notice me, but another friend of mine did notice and followed me out to my car. I explained the promise I made and left without another word. I still wonder what would have happened if I had stayed. Maybe nothing at all. But there are some parts of me that I can never take off.

the flight home

emeline ring

This is a sight I haven't seen in a year and a half: mountaintops breaking through the clouds outlined by the soft orange and pink glow of the sunset. Despite the sun, the tops of the mountains look hazy due to the blanket of fog laying on top of them. They seem to go on forever, eventually blending into the clouds on the horizon. I see the various peaks and valleys with rivers in between, some snowcapped despite the temperate weather.

Inside the plane, where my legs are beginning to cramp after being seated for three hours, I can feel the wonderful ache of stretching them out after a day hiking in the mountains. Despite the stuffy air in the flight cabin, where I share oxygen with dozens of passengers, I can feel the crisp sting of air in the woods. My skin might be dry from the lack of moisture, but I can feel the warmth of the sun on my face, causing a healthy sheen of sweat and a light pink sunburn. My ears might be irritated from the elevation, but I can still hear the sounds of the mountain around me—the trickle of streams, the swaying of trees, the soft breeze, and the occasional mountain lion or deer. And despite these sounds, there is still a sense of peace and quiet, being away from the rest of the world.

**i can still
hear the
sounds of
the mountain
around me**

From my elevated view, I have the opportunity to take in everything all at once. But will I be able to do the same when I land? An unfortunate side effect of traveling is the pressure to properly soak in every experience, to get the most out of each second. While I have no doubt that I'll enjoy my week in Washington, there will always be the timetable in the back of my mind, counting down the days and hours until I have to leave again. Will I leave wishing I had done more, or wishing I had slowed down and taken the time to just be? I can't wait for the plans and dates I've arranged with old friends. But when those are over, will I feel satisfied by doing seemingly

mundane activities like driving around Tacoma or running errands at the local grocery store or grabbing coffee from my favorite café? I don't want the significant events to somehow supersede the smaller, personal moments that will stick with me. All I know is that I need to take advantage of my time, one way or another. I'm determined to.

One moment the mountains are going on forever. The next, I can see small groups of buildings and houses, all broken up by an endless canopy of Evergreen trees. It's like a blanket over the cities. Closer to the ground, I see the effect the changing of the seasons has had on them. The deep green is peppered with radiant hues of gold, orange, and red. Even more beautiful is the sight of water, first little streams here and there, and then large lakes and sounds broken up by bridges and boats. It seems too good to be true that the mountains, forests, beaches, and the ocean can be found within miles of each other, but the proof is evident through my tiny window on the plane.

God's image

heather jueDES

This body was never mine to begin with.
Someone gave it to me
to use wisely and carefully.
Every time I step in front of a mirror, I wonder
why I don't like what I see.
The large masses of fat sit around my arms, my hips, my thighs.
My knees look distorted when standing straight
my hands look abnormal, every finger being bent slightly the wrong way
my stomach is covered in marks that prove I grew
too quickly for my body to understand.
Why do I feel so young, yet so old?
I'm just twenty years old, but the experiences
of following trend after trend
have made my body feel so old, my mind tired.
Clothing feels like this world's way
of tucking me in and whispering in my ear
"You'll never fit."
Do others feel this way?
Or is it just me, in this body given to me?

There's another whisper.
Another hand untucks me from the constraints of society's clothing.
The whisper tells me, "You are clothed in strength and dignity."
I'm reminded that all bodies have their own
distortions, dysfunctions, and mysteries
I shouldn't compare myself to them.
I was made unique.
I was made for a purpose.

i've never cut myself with an electric razor

michael bless

But I have with a disposable one
Early one Sunday Morning
Running late for Church
My hair is a mess
Probably due to rustling in my sleep
I really should stop taking a bath
The night before church as
I probably look like some kind of
Unloved homeless porcupine man
Too bad that's the aesthetic I go for

Does God really care about
The state my face is in
During my visit to his house?
Probably not, but I wouldn't
Want the blue haired ladies getting
Offended in the back pews
The ones who beg
'For heaven's sake
Why can't we just sing
Jesus loves me or
Something like that?'

I'm still staring at my face in a stained mirror
Not caring about anything but the distant
Feeling the blood gives me as it drips
Off my face into the sink
I grab a paper towel that as soon
As it feels the drip on its
Rough skin deteriorates as if
Its job isn't to actually soak things up
I walk out holding my towel to my face
While I lick my other hand to attempt
To tame my unkempt hair
As I defeatedly trudge to the car

the mechanic's criticism

matthew skifton

this robot is busted
it looks all wrong
it needs a ripcord to start
and can hardly speak. what's the point
in a robot with no heart?
what's up with the head? it looks too human.
wake up! your friend is dying!
I was sure that would work
not even a response
this robot is busted

*hold on
I left some things in the attic*

*over there? that's just my robot
it's broken
don't touch it*

Buzzes, clicks, beeps, and a spark
a robot has made itself
a heart.
a heart like an engine!
far off in an attic
a robot sleeps
and it dreams
of everyday ordinary sheep.
goodnight Mr. Robot Head
you don't have to use it.
perhaps soon
but not yet
:_

the third sister

hannah bockoven
& eleonore mumme

Let us philosophize, then, on the night of Monday, November 12th, 2018. We set off as women are wont to do: late and on the topic of men. The wind blew us into cold not unlike that of distant Moscow, through snow which chilled us to the bone, in a turbulent tugboat of a car, toward Minneapolis. Try as we might, we could not navigate the minds of men as swiftly as the Minnesotan roads. It took little time for our conversation to twist into other topics, from literature and politics to laughing at ourselves for our obvious tardiness. We stopped for coffee, for snacks, for fuel, delaying our arrival even further, no doubt, but was this not truly living? To be in motion, embracing the reality of our predicament rather than resisting it.

We knew, though, that we would be late. But, akin to the play we were bound to for the evening, there was no villain in our narrative. No terrible twist of fate, nor any heroes either. Just two of us heralded by the call of Chekhov, through the snow and into his world. How curious that it should snow on a night such as this, when we were already thinking of our Russian brethren, of their constant struggle against elements such as these. Both life and marriage, we speculated, were simply struggles, a process of reaping and sowing and surviving. Both require hard work and embrace of imperfection.

Soon we reached his sanctuary, a sacred place of Russia (and perhaps of secular interest to Minnesotans). Steeple erect, this church-turned-museum stood out against the snow, warm light flowing down its entrance ramp. We cut across the foggy congested streets into this small, warm place, only to be greeted by a woman who wondered sternly that anyone would choose to come as late as we to her Museum of Russian Art.

"The first act is already coming to a close," she said, finding our

names on her list.

“We know,” said we, with bold solidarity. “We had car trouble.”

“Oh yes,” compassion invoked, “well, you’ll have to cross over to the other side.”

And we did, tiptoeing through a crowd of spectacles and sweaters. Every word hung in the gallery with an air of importance, and we cut through the quizzical stares to sink into our seats at last. What fools would come so late, our well-dressed colleagues perchance wondered, to visit *The Three Sisters*?

We had barely settled in when a cry of “Marry me!” birthed joy into the hall from the stage. Knowing little else, we had beforehand inferred the play must be about three sisters. We quickly caught on to the heavy influence their father, home, and some worthy, wealthy gentlemen had also inflicted upon our Siberian sisters. The curtain was drawn on our Russian countryside’s first act, and it was

**a cry of
“Marry me!”
birthed joy
into the hall
from the
stage**

met with great applause (rowdy and not un-intimidating). What must we have missed? With a shrug we found we couldn’t be troubled by it, setting our eyes only on that which lay before us. Instead, we beheld the canvases which lined the hall, all feminist portraits which, we both agreed, seemed to nod approval to the three sisters we had come to cheer along.

At a near table sat an assortment of Slavic treats, the crown of which were round, powdered pryaniki, which we pocketed in disposable tea cups for our later enjoyment. They were hearty and satisfying, which all food and literature must be, nourishing to man and his soul. We found ourselves so consciously aware of our place, so perfectly content in that room of such particular warmth, of a people who were content to be and be surrounded by Russian art and Russian story, which was unravelling itself for us.

Soon it called us back to our seats and began again its own unraveling. Sent away were the actors, called instead to stand

as sisters, fathers, philosophers, and soldiers, who stood on a makeshift stage, each with their scripts upon their stands. They were an assortment of age, size, experience, and ethnicity. But with Chekov’s words in their mouths, all of them became Russian. Perhaps the same might have been said of the audience.

* * *

Though we missed most of the play, it was immediately clear that the play is not meant to be fantastical. It is simply a story of people trying to survive life and each other. In just one home live three sisters, their brother, his wife, a few servants and a steady rotation of guests and visitors. Coexisting in a small Russian farm town, they dream constantly of Moscow and muse on their own dissatisfied state. By the time we entered, a woman barely four and twenty stood onstage, questioning what it was to exist, wondering what the course for her own life would be compared to her sisters, who had already found their professions, their passions. What would she do? Where should she go? Whom should she marry? Whether or not she meant to, she seemed to nod to us most of most of all, for her questions mirrored our own. The play was full of sullen questions that we had posed ourselves on the drive up. We’d tried to solve the riddles of men, our futures, and our contributions to community, to history, and we found ourselves as unable to answer these questions as she. At one point a man cried out onstage, saying something like, “Let us philosophize, then, while we wait for our tea. Will mankind improve in 300 years? Or will he be very much the same, facing the same terrible problems of today?” Chekhov takes away any dream of Moscow, leaving our sister in her farm town, in the same place she began. Her betrothed, a man she does not love, is shot and killed in a duel, leaving her where she started. It means that she cannot go to Moscow. It means too, though, she does not have to marry a man she doesn’t love. She and her sisters, her whole household in fact, stay where they started. They must stay, but they have found the determination to live.

At the end, a smaller band of us stuck around to ask questions of the actors and our Sisters’ director. They sat in smiles, awaiting inquiry and reflection, confident both were inevitable.

We heard her first, then, the most pleased and most vocal of us all. When she spoke, her enthusiasm enveloped the rest of the room in praise, questions, and in the folds of her magnificent white fur coat. Back and forth, we tossed our questions alongside hers, and amidst the flying questions, we silently asked—*could this be she? A third sister to complete our two? Elder, wiser, her questions betrayed again and again that she, as we did, had watched herself on that stage, speaking in Chekhov's words.*

Shyly we asked the actors about their love for their Chekhov counterparts, and gladly they answered.

"I am not unlike my character," chimed one (attractive) thespian, "I too am a jerk in most settings. One on one, I can be a decent guy, but get me in a group and some terrible guy comes out." He pronounced this without a hint shame, and our whole band seemed... delighted. Privileged. The room felt such joy, the kind that could not be quenched for some time. Particularly the director, himself as Russian as the play, laughed and his eyes shone with joy as bright as his head was bald and his sweater colorful. His laughs had been the hardest at every joke, proud of each performance. Being in this room, the harsh reality of life and of our own character felt so exposed, examined, and accepted, all in good company, who accepted all as we came, not for the masks we often hid behind. Our drive seemed well worthwhile, even in the snow, just to find people with whom we could spend the evening in raw examination of ourselves.

"It is a matter of being grateful, I think," said an elderly woman who had played one of the servants. "They live. They decide to live, and the main thing, then, is being grateful. Think about how happy the servants are. They appreciate their beds and being warm. That's all life is—being grateful. That's what playing my part taught me."

When all was said and done, we met the woman in a white fur coat at the door: our own third sister, a woman who likewise lived a life Chekhov seemed to have composed. She stood at the exit with her companion, waiting for us it seemed. More likely she simply didn't want to leave quite yet. Neither did we, and perhaps this was why

we fell into a conversation which flowed constantly from one topic to another, as though we were old friends. We talked about the show, about Russia, about the art that dressed the gallery. At one point, upon hearing that someone so young could love Russia so much that she would dedicate her life to its literature, the woman seized our shoulders, and together we for a moment felt that we saw life through one bond, and one passion. It was not merely Chekhov that bound us so tightly together in that moment, nor art, nor literature, but rather all of Russia.

"You are the future of Russia," she whispered, and we could not argue, for in that moment, it was as though she taught us that the future is ours to mold, and the past ours to cherish and celebrate. She, the glorious past, setting like the Russian sunsets she painted, called us to rise like the morning sun, so that there would be a dawn to the part of the world we collectively adored.

it was as though she taught us that the future is ours to mold We spoke for some time before her companion insisted that our third sister begin her long journey home. She begged that we take her coat from her, a literal passing on of the mantle that, in her eyes, a woman who has already seen her seventies come and go need no longer wear. We, though, knew we are still too young to shoulder so weighty a gift and thanked her, insisting she bear the family coat for a few more years. We swept her out the door as she compared the colors of her driveway that morning with Soviet winter paintings of her younger years. She could see every color as though the paintings still stood before her. We waited as she climbed into her car.

Then we too left, crossing the streets, not minding the cold quite as much as before. The ride back bore even more philosophizing regarding our own futures, that of Russia, with which we knew had just been entrusted. What will these futures be, we wondered, and who can bring them about? And, as one Chekhovian sister had asked, so we asked of ourselves— *Will anything truly be different in 300 years? Or will everything be very much the same?*

If Chekhov is to be believed, progress is not the purpose of life.

To him, and to those of us tucked away in a snowstorm in an abandoned sanctuary, life means simply striving to get by, over and over again. To live happily is to be grateful, to embrace; embrace your own life, embrace your community, embrace your brothers and especially your sisters in a world that is cold and often disappoints you. We will always be searching for our third sister. That night, we found her in the woman in the white fur coat. The week following it was a writer, our friend in a coffee shop, then the woman we found our seats next to in a chapel pew. We always look for her, our sister, with whom we can clasp hands and simply strive, together, to be truly alive.

harsh climates

maren thompson

Let us consider the wildflower. There is no one way to describe a wildflower. Like us, they take on many shapes. Some tall, some short; some round, thin, social, or isolated. Wildflowers are found all over the world, scattered like the people from Babel, learning to survive with their newly confused voices. Since wildflowers by nature need no human interference, they are able to grow in regions that are downright discouraging, especially to a being as tender as a wildflower. You might say that the wildflower does not live in its surroundings; it lives in spite of them.

For example, we may ponder *eschscholzia californica*, commonly known as the California poppy, California sunlight, or a cup of gold. It is the state flower of California. A golden flower for the golden state. It blooms from February to September, setting the hills on fire. The weather it thrives in is as warm as the glow emanating from the flower itself, golden-yellow as a child's curls and bright as her laughter. When the weather is so hot that mothers bring their children and dogs indoors, give popsicles to the children, water to the dogs, the California poppy remains resolute, even with no mother to nurture it. The California poppy is tall enough to stretch

**the California
poppy remains
resolute, even
with no mother
to nurture it**

towards its namesake, petals cupped to catch every drop of sun that shines down, encouraging their survival. The heat may be nothing, but the poppy is not made for freezing. At night, when the chill seeps in and signals the joints of the old, the cup of gold closes its petals, pulls all into itself and sleeps.

Where the California poppy thrives in heat, the Lenten rose, *helleborus orientalis*, does the opposite. The Lenten rose has the heart of an arctic explorer, surviving temperatures down to thirty-five degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. In climates cold enough, the

rose becomes deciduous and sheds its lovely garments. Though the leaves are gone, and the flower is bare, it is not dead. It sleeps the deep sleep of a student after exams or an anesthetized patient. Then comes a waking so welcome to the rose, the student, and the patient. It is a waking of renewal and rebirth. The new leaves push through to signal a change, a new life. The difficult times are past. Though called a rose, *helleborus* is not actually a rose. Its shape recalls that of its more familiar bloom. The flower can take on the rosiness of its naming, but it can also deepen into the blood of royalty, sometimes even to the blue of the midnight gulf. The Lenten rose grows in clumps of three or four, in close communion with its few companions.

What must that sleep be like for the poppy and the rose? Do they know when they shut themselves off from the world that it is only temporary? Or do they believe they have lived their last days? I don't know how time works in the world of flowers, but maybe the end of each day is the end of a long, well-lived life for each of them; maybe the poppies welcome the coming of the cold and rest like we do at the end of a long, hard day or week or month. Perhaps the Lenten rose sheds her royal robes, rivals of Solomon, to slip at last into her lover's embrace. She finds the same comfort in her long-awaited companionship as we do, nestled in each other's arms, silently celebrating our survival.

**prairie smoke
emulates the
heartiness of
wives who
went west**

The *geum triflorum*, or prairie smoke, is tolerant of most soil types. It can grow in the dry atmosphere of the surrounding prairie and remains rooted even when the winds of tornadoes pull at their hands, begging them to go with them. The prairie smoke emulates the heartiness of wives who went west, following hopeful husbands. Like these wives, there is no need to worry for prairie smoke; they can handle many different climates and will work to make any spot their home.

Flowers grow in all sorts of conditions. The world's oldest known blooming plant apparently grew entirely submerged in water. Fossils are all that remain to tell us about this flower. Some flowers, such as

daisies and black-eyed Susans, grow all over. They can even grow on the lawns of homes filled with abuse. Every day, hearing shouts and cries, they remain resolute. Their loveliness is unmarred by the harshness of their habitat. This is probably why, in moments of reprieve, occupants of such unhappy homes find themselves among such organisms, plucking them from the ground to drink in their scent— a relished and rare moment of gentleness.

Silene latifolia, the white campion, grows around gravestones. Their vigil is for those dead who have no one left to mourn them.

There are little wildflowers that grow in clumps of yellow, purple, and white. I don't know what these flowers are called, but they grow in the forest of Thuringia in central Germany. I came across them sitting in a field just outside Buchenwald concentration camp. The flowers grow all over the property, lining the path that prisoners walked as they were marched to their fates. The forest surrounding the camp is carpeted in tiny white blooms. Where I was sitting, I could still see the buildings that housed horrors beyond imagining. From that spot, covered in tiny blooms, one could easily have heard the screams. It is said that the towns nearby were overcome with the odors coming from the camp. Maybe that is one of the reasons the flowers grew where they did, to cover the stench of death.

* * *

Erysimum capitatum is called the Western wallflower. It clings to the rocks of the alpine terrains like supplicants at a Western wall, never wavering in their devotion to the promise of renewal. Where hikers turn away from the path, the wallflowers remain. They are the color of rainboots pulled on to defy the storm raging around, or sometimes the color of the rusty rocks themselves. They are strong enough to cling to crevices non-conductive to their survival. The Western wallflower is not as alone as their name would imply. The Western wallflower grows in clusters and enjoys the companionship of another also surviving in a world full of elements strong enough to rip apart oil rigs. The wallflower, though, remains resolute even when oil rigs are nothing more than spare parts in the ocean.

The world is a severe place. Wind-hewn rocks; dry, cracked earth; gigantic waves fit to tear vessels apart; words said in haste and without remorse. The most beautiful parts of the world, though, are often the places too dangerous for humans to survive in, wild places that are only fit for flowers. It takes courage to be a wildflower. Surrounded by a world so fallen that its only purpose is to tear them from where they stand, wildflowers could become the harshest organisms in the cosmos. They live on the edges of human exploration and beyond. The wildflowers do not adapt to their surroundings the way anything else would; they instead remain soft and gentle. They cling to those around them, clustered intimately in shared perseverance.

remember

karee henrich (after joy harjo)

Remember the hands of your grandmother,
but go past the aches and pains they hold.
Remember instead when they were strong and held you close.
Remember how they guided your own
once small hands, as you learned to measure flour
into the bright red KitchenAid. Remember the patience
stored within their marrow.
Remember the days spent pouring out the jar
of mismatched buttons onto the countertop.
Remember her helping you sort them
by color, texture, and everything in between;
teaching you how they are to be sewn to shirts.
Remember the woman she taught you to be.
Remember when she built you cities with clothespins
and king sized sheets, crawling under their roofs to
snuggle next to you and read you books
with adventures too big for clothespins to cling to.
Remember her kindness and her habit
of accidentally making too many cookies for one house,
leaving her no choice but to send a plate home with
anyone that would walk through the back door.
Remember to give the bad ones to the birds.
Remember to call her, even when you're busy.
Remember to call her, especially when you're busy.
Remember to thank her
for the work of her hands.
Remember to thank her.
Remember.

when a mother sings

amber murry

“Sing loud in church,
be the bell, calling all to come.
Sing soft to your children,
be the blanket, soothing them to sleep.”
This is a part of the mother song, the teaching song,
one generation of my family to the next,
who knows from when or where?

When my mother sang me to sleep
every night, the same words of the same song,
I begged her to stop but she
never did and always she
made melody of the curse that
whispered, could never be shut out
from my head when I covered my ears:

“May all your dreams come true.”

But, what about my nightmares?
Those were all I ever seemed to have
as a child, I think I hardly knew the difference
between flying and crashing
this plane I was often piloting
but the mountain ahead was so pretty
I only wanted to see it again and again.

Is that what happened to her?

Did she dream
of cutting her hair close to her head,
the day after she was married,
because her husband told her to?
of quitting her job
when my brother was born
only to hear that she was fired instead?

Sing me a song, Mom,
where you never were forced to give up
because you had more dreams
bursting from your belly
than you could catch with your hands
spread wide, grasping tiny hands you knew
you couldn't hold forever.

Please, I need to know
not every nightmare, and not
every dream comes true. You promise me
that this is your dream
and I wonder
how you could fall asleep and
if you worry about crashing.

the melody of a surgical mask

hannah dosch

"I'll Fight" by Daughtry –

His daughter is singing it today
And though she sings sweetly
All he can hear are the calls
At 2 a.m., midnight surgeries, ER consults.
He tries to remember why
He put himself in a sterile prison.
But that song whispers out of the car
Radio and he hums along thinking
His daughter will wake up and not worry
About whether there will be food on the table at supper,
Or if money will be an issue.
The bags under his eyes are only
A small sacrifice for the assurance
Of what his little girl will never
Have to face, like he did, when
he was a double booked fry cook.

My mother tells me when I was young
And my ears ached of infection it left me
Screaming for my father.
For his burly arms to comfort me
The way any daughter wants to find
Safety in her father's presence.

I never knew what the question *Do you feel
safe at home?* felt like till last summer.
This question came from a concerned parent
Noticing the plum colored bruise from a softball.

I thought, how startled
Such a mundane question can leave me –
Almost speechless.
My father's hands are gentle,
despite irritation from latex gloves
And skin worn down with suds and soap.
Sky blue makes his bones heavy.
His feet tire at the thought of linoleum floors.
He pales under the harsh rays of UV lights.

My father abusive?

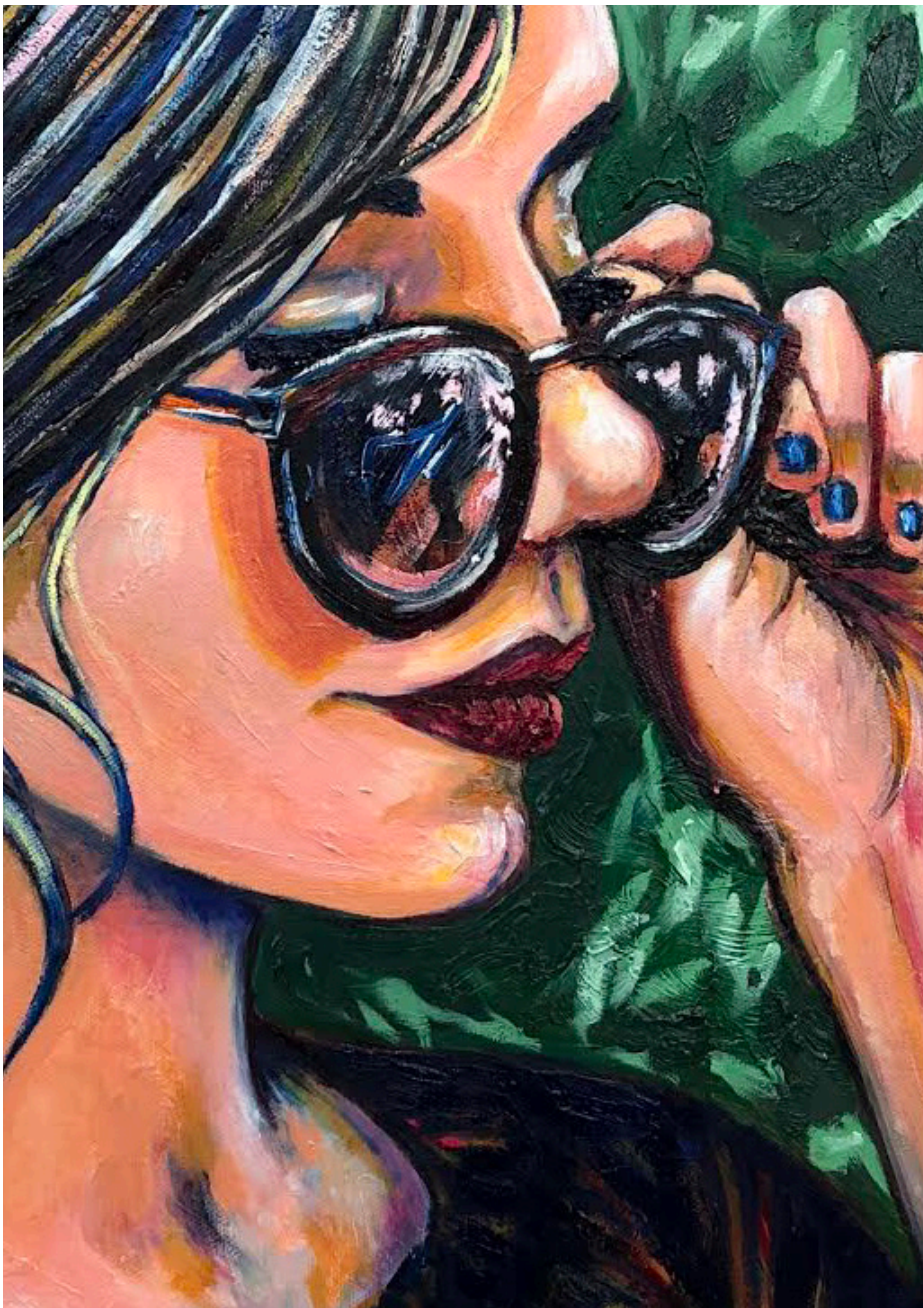
Words that cut me. I'd prefer surgery over
Their scrutiny.

They got it all wrong.
My father did not go to medical school
To learn the art of hurting women.

No, my father learned how
To care for those you love, the importance
Of time spent together and how
a cooing voice can comfort any nightmare.
How hands can be a weapon
Used to save lives.

My father is humming a melody. I recognize it.

It will take me more hours to recognize the song
Than it does for me to know its meaning and it
Is difficult to say why the image of a surgical
Mask always appears when I hear it.



natalie
emma bloedel
oil on canvas



workshop
emma hislop
digital painting



to choose

sophia weisensel

oil on canvas



beautiful mother / सुंदर आई

elsie abrahamson

photography



a new chapter

doris lyu

photography



my love
mindy pitzner
ink stippling



katherine

emily kimball

costume sketch



edith head
madelaine cordes
digital painting



winter snuggles

sarah oas
oil on canvas

cotton candy

sydney kappel

There is a photo hanging in my house. Really, there are many photos in my home, so this one would not stand out to a visitor as it hangs on my kitchen wall under a collage of family photos and next to the phone. In the photo, there is a young boy hanging onto the yellow ropes of a tree swing. The photo was taken fairly close up, so you can vividly see this boy's face. He has blonde hair, almost white in the sun, and he has the biggest smile; his smile radiates pure joy in the form of twenty pearly-white baby teeth. He has earth-brown eyes looking back at the camera, and he appears to be about six or seven. This photo has clung to my wall without a frame since 2009, masking tape on the back side to keep it up. The brightest aspect of the photo, besides this boy's smile, is a royal blue Fastenal hat on the boy's bright blonde head.

This boy and I were great friends. Our friendship happened as a result of our families being friends. Because of this, I cannot count the number of times we would play with our brothers, having Nerf sword fights or playing Rock Band at their country house while our parents talked about church or Obama's latest stupidity over grilling burgers and sizzling hot dogs. Country music always played at his house, and while my brother and I stayed out of the tall grass in their backyard for fear of ticks, everyone at their household ran right in without fear. Fear didn't rule my life before 2009, but events like this one remind me that there were traces even then.

2009 did not start off badly. In fact, it was an okay year for me for a while. I was in 5th grade then, and my biggest concern at that time was fighting with my mom to let me keep my bangs as I liked to cover my face. One day that year, my church sponsored an event in which some of the congregation could go to see a Twins game at the Metrodome in Minneapolis. My dad is an avid lover of baseball, so my family got tickets along with David. His name was David.

David's parents didn't go to the Twins game with us. His dad had to work at Fastenal and his mom and siblings had things to do, so he tagged along with my family and one other family that was going. David loved baseball, so he was having the time of his life. When the hawkers came around selling food, David decided to try some pink and blue cotton candy. I sat sipping my Minute Maid Lemonade while watching him experience his first taste of the whipped sugar, and upon placing the fluff on his tongue, he exclaimed, "This tastes like hair!" We all laughed and helped him eat the remainder of his "hair," and I remember seeing him laugh through his stained-blue lips as we all turned our attention back to the game at hand.

**watching him
experience his
first taste of the
whipped sugar**

The next time I saw David, he was laying down in a suit. He wasn't smiling, he never would smile again. I felt like I would never smile again too, as I stood with my parents in front of his all-too-short earth-brown coffin, tears stinging my eyes. His lips were blue, and I thought of cotton candy. My tears fell into my hair.

2009 was one of the worst years of my life. David had been a perfectly healthy first grader who liked tree swings, cool gadgets, and holding his baby sister who was over half his size. His laugh was contagious, and after he died, no one seemed to laugh the same. 2009 was the year of the H1N1 flu—the swine flu. It attacked his heart. Ironic, really. He had so much heart. His parents took him in to the doctor when he wasn't well, and they assured him he was just sick, that he'd be going to school the following Monday after some blue Gatorade and rest. They took him to their country home, and he became weaker, his feet eventually turning blue. They called 9-1-1 when he fell, and as the helicopter landed, his soul went up out of his body from his father's arms back to the hands above that made him.

I wasn't the same after that. I became afraid. I thought that if someone who was six years old could die without warning, I could die at any time. I began checking my pulse, washing my

hands obsessively, even when they cracked and my friends made fun of me. I never overcame my fear of ticks—there’s something disconcerting about insects that burrow into your skin and drain the life from your veins. I desperately cling to life, even when I hate it. I’ve seen too much of what happens to people when people they love go away. So I’ve made up my mind to stay, sucking air for life through panic attacks that appear out of the blue. David is gone, but I find him everywhere in my writing, almost as if I’m trying to bring him back to life with ink and lined paper.

Unsurprisingly, I don’t really eat cotton candy. I find that within its sugary fluff, I taste something bitter. As it touches my tongue, I start to smile for a brief moment thinking of hair and my friend’s blue smile, but that start of a smile quickly fades as everything else blue comes to my mind.

a villanelle stolen from the desk of saint peter

ian overn

The creeping thought that I should be elsewhere
I skip the golden feast and dine alone.
How can heaven be perfect if I’m there?

Shade pearly blinds and hide away my prayer
It corners me inside my lavish home,
the creeping thought that I should be elsewhere.

The cherubim agree I’m worse for wear;
my deeds are empty, outside rule of Rome.
How can heaven be perfect if I’m there?

Eternity is something to beware
if it’s spent trying, failing, to atone.
The creeping thought that I should be elsewhere,

it hurls me off the edge into the air
to prove my worth or fall to land unknown.
How can heaven be perfect if I’m there?

In paradise it’s sinful to despair.
The only force to keep me from the throne:
the creeping thought that I should be elsewhere.
How can heaven be perfect if I’m there?

i've not known rivers

ethan becker (after langston hughes)

I've not known rivers.
I wasn't brought up on the Mississippi
Nor did I lounge in the Minnesota.

I was never lulled to sleep
by the wind, rushing through the fields
as I lay still.

I've never sunk my feet into the earth.
Like my ancestors, with that blue clay that mounts on the banks,
like defensive walls, impeding some ancestral secret.

I'm not in that colored ground,
but maybe I'm in the shade of the oak.
Like the giant sentinels which stood guard, watching
as my friends and I ran about for hours,
shooting down cops as robbers, and robbers as cops.

I may be in the child's footprint,
which leaves its own seemingly eternal mark on the earth,
until the shores of that same Mississippi rise up
and swallow it.
So that it's left for a memory.

No, I don't believe I can ever know where my soul will be.
But perhaps, just perhaps, I can know me.

sway, wrap, curl

eleonore mumme

You, swaying in a leather jacket, heart pounding,
You, swaying in a leather jacket, heart pounding,
I taste hops on my lips with just one sip.
I taste hops on my lips with just one sip.
Heart pounding in a jacket, swaying with just one sip,
I taste leather. You? Hops, on my lips.

Wrapping your arms around me, singing along,
Wrapping your arms around me, singing along,
Leaning back, caught up in the comfort of this song,
Leaning back, caught up in the comfort of this song,
Singing along, this song wrapping up around me,
Caught, leaning back, in the comfort of your arms.

I curl up beside you, half asleep,
I curl up beside you, half asleep,
You move my glass, and sink in next to me.
You move my glass, and sink in next to me.
I sink into my next glass, and you move,
Curl up beside me, half asleep.

Leaning back, wrapping you up in my arms,
I taste the comfort of your lips, half asleep.
This song, and a leather jacket, to hops and a glass, in just one sip,
Swaying, caught, heart pounding with my next move.
Curl up beside, around me
I sink in on you, singing along.

to the man who sheared our sheep

michael bless

You owned a saddle shop in my insignificant town
Every time I saw you, you smelled of leather
That handlebar mustache falling down your mouth
Like all of the western heroes I never had as a child

You usually arrived in the spring or summer
With your clippers and cowboy hat
Your buttons on your pearl-clasped button-up shirt
Were whiter than the wool you trimmed

You tried to start conversation with me
Asking the name of our sheep
I told you livestock didn't need names
You laughed. I didn't. Sheep are all the same.

'Let's get to business' you say
As you climb into the pen
Flicking your clippers on
A warning siren to your victims

I open the gate for you
A curious sheep enters
Grabbing it, you flip it quickly
Like a wrestler slamming his opponent

The clippers peel the sheep's coat off
Slowly giving it new life in the air of spring
It struggles pinned between your legs
But ultimately decides you're okay

The clippers graze the last chunk
You let go of the sheep
It wonders, rattled
Stares with a blank look of contentment

The sheep takes a few steps
actual weight lifted
From its back. It runs out of the pen
And looks back from afar at its freshly shed coat

new year's eve

hans bloedel

I spent the remaining nights of the year with my friends.
On the final night we feasted together,
unbound by blood,
but by the laughter we shared,
and we drank to the year and to each other.
We set outside
in the final Minnesota snow of the year.
Embracing without touching.
Watching the winter butterflies
together
while we walked to meet more friends.
And we drank to the year and to each other.

We gambled with quarters
(as friends do, where I'm from)
on lawn chairs in garages.
And we laughed.
I couldn't imagine it without that.
It stitched our fabric of friendship first
and will keep us woven forever.

But as I watched the ball drop
in the city on TV,
I realized I was alone in their company,
fraying from their fabric.
Another year had passed
and I was exactly as I started.
My friends had all grown and moved without me.
They had their significant others.
They had their degrees.
Their jobs.
I still had a college and a couch.

I was content with the life I lived,
I just wished they lived it with me.
Because I remember when they did.
When we laughed around a dinner table,
and slept in our backyards in tents.
My life of then has been confined to some weekends now,
and it continues to slowly unravel from their fray
as they move on.
How long until it's only me?
What will feel like home?

But I let go of these thoughts,
and lived in the moment
with them.
Because I enjoyed the time we had,
drinking to the year and to each other,
and I prayed the New Year brought us more of these moments,
for fear of falling obsolete.

gone north

laura marzolf

It was a weekend of bitter cold.
Every step crunched and the world around me
smelled of pine and sweet,
smoky wood. Sunlight burned
beautiful orange and yellow, blinding me
with the bleached snow that glittered
like a wedding dress. At night,
frailer lights twinkled along the path
back to the cabin. It was a one-foot wide path
surrounded by snow that was two feet deep.
When I fell, the snow ate my feet
one by one. It consumed my hand and forearm
as I struggled to get up. A gigantic, fluffy monster
in a wedding gown. Ready to capture me
in an armless embrace.

Outside you could always hear a drip
like an old faucet releasing drops off the roof
of the lodge where we would go for popcorn
and hot chocolate when the frigid air had taken its toll.

The arms of the trees took my heart
as they cracked their bones. Often,
I would quickly look to see who
was there and find only the trees.

maniac wind

matthew skifton

I stepped into the half dead
room. Soon it would be filled

with others waiting. The snowstorm outside
wanted everybody to know who was in charge.

I walked up to you, unaware.
I asked if you were ready.

You smiled with the smile
of a corpse, ugly and forced.

I didn't even notice
I was talking to a messenger.

The next three minutes were
a reminder of who was in charge

when the wind slammed its fists
against the windows. It cracked

your mind and spoke
through your mouth.

My friend was dead on the road.
Then it laughed at me

through its whistles outside.
It took our thoughts with it as toll.

It took three more minutes to reclaim mine.
Three more minutes for mourning.

the plight of the dog-faced boy

jacob kempfert

We discovered our repertory had been infiltrated by a spy from a rival company. This provocateur was revealed when it became apparent we had two dog-faced boys instead of our usual one, the singular Flopsy Rufus, whose work amongst dog-faced boys is unparalleled and universally praised. Not only had we two dog-faced boys instead of one, but we, for how long exactly none were certain, had exhibited two separate dog-faced boy tents with twice the usual hours of dog-faced boy performance. We stood the two next to each other and, although Flopsy Rufus is a beloved and respected member of our community, we had significant trouble distinguishing the two. Finally we asked them and they both claimed to be Rufus. But our Rufus alone identified himself as *Flopsy Rufus*; this other

we, for how long exactly none were certain, had exhibited two separate dog-faced boy tents with twice the usual hours of dog-faced boy performance

Rufus identified himself as *Spotsy Rufus*. This is when we realized this second dog-faced boy belonged to a competitor's troupe. We immediately assumed subterfuge, but Spotsy Rufus insisted he followed the wrong cart to the wrong camp and only that moment standing alongside Flopsy Rufus had he realized he was not among his own. What secrets had he gathered? we asked him, What tricks and japes acquired from us free of charge? None, none, none, he barked. Our two troupes resembled each other entirely, he claimed with suspicious innocence, there wasn't a single difference he'd spotted until

we dragged him out to face his double. Our freaks were identical! Impossible! Spotsy Rufus was either a liar or a rube. Our handlers shaved him clean and then loosed him in the woods blindfolded and

three kilometers from our camp. Flopsy Rufus, deeply melancholic from this encounter, sulked in his tent and cancelled two days' performances, utterly shocked, we supposed, to see someone exactly like himself. We reassured him that the very idea of any other troupe remotely resembling the grandeurized horror of our own repertory was inherently absurd, and this so-called *Spotsy Rufus* was nothing more than a contemptible deceiver, vile to his core, a threat to every community of outcasts. After two days we read in the local newspapers of an incident involving a pack of feral water deer and a wayward boy lost in the woods. We delivered these reports to Flopsy Rufus, who seemed heartened by them, and resumed his performance schedule the next day. We could never confirm if this child was that same shaven Spotsy, but we wished it was for the sake of our Flopsy, and even if it was a different child, one who was, more or less, *innocent*—we agreed that in the nature of things it is best for the innocent, the average, the satisfied, the rubes, to experience terrific tragedy. For such things make it possible for us to empathize with them.

ars poetica with whiskey or ode to obsessions or my girlfriend asked what i was thinking

ezekiel grabau

Is poetry a metaphor for life or is life a poetry for metaphor?
I mean
rather
is life a metaphor for poetry or maybe
metaphor is the life of poetry?
Pretend I wrote something wise for old time's sake
imagine that I bent the words to bear my burdens like boughs
words are like henpecked husbands that way
always being bothered about how
late they were out or how
much they worked or how
their day was dear or why
are you so sad sometimes or why
can't things just be simple for once or I
understand why can't you understand
or do you love me?
It would be no surprise if words started drinking whiskey
or watching porn when no one was looking
or wandered into the woods and fell asleep beneath the boughs
of pine and woke up twenty years bygone antediluvian and hoary.
Words are so misunderstood
like the quiet person in the corner who sits
silent while someone explains how this poem is about addiction
clearly, all the while knowing deep down exactly
what she thinks I meant.
Words are like old metaphors which no one really understands

except for the one still insisting on the theme of addiction
clearly, we keep them around like the same old souvenirs
of a historical site or a road trip we barely remember
but means something
clearly, otherwise
why keep them?
Maybe my life
I mean
Maybe my metaphors don't make sense to you
which wouldn't surprise me much since
I still don't fully understand how
to bend the words to say what I mean or if
antediluvian is as outdated and awkward
as assuming the gender of the silent student or if
hoary is as tired and tried
as a drunk sitting on a high stool denying his addiction or if
they are hardy like flexible yet unbreakable boughs or if
I am just spinning in circles
looking for three words to a simple personal question
and burdening three hundred more
which clearly mean as much to you as they do to me
otherwise,
why keep them?
Why give them my secrets, my burdens, my effort
if they do not have the weight to bend your mind?

to capture the sea

hannah bockoven

And by the time she had reached it, the shore, she didn't want to move from this place. The difficulties of the day had no hold on her here, and she knew what it was to free.

Richard cursed quietly, scratching several times through the lines he had written. He felt impatient at the wind as it picked up. His hair, grown too long, was now in his eyes, and the pages of his notebook fought to turn. Perhaps, he thought, it was time to go inside.

He paused to watch clouds traveling quickly across the sky. Perhaps it was the wind or his saturated mind that prevented him from noticing the barefoot woman walking across the beach. It wasn't until she gently touched his shoulder that he broke from his daydreaming. He looked up and it took him a moment to recognize the woman who stared back at him from over the rims of her sunglasses.

"Gwen."

"I've brought food," she spoke loudly over the wind. She looked over the small, pale blue beach house at the edge of the beach. "Is the door unlocked?" Richard nodded. She looked him over again in an unreadable expression before heading to the house. He watched, in a state of mild shock. He should have offered to carry the bag. A whim to catch up with her came and went. Instead he sat in the cold, watching the gray sky grow a little darker. His mind wandered, but a shiver brought him back to the present. He wasn't sure how long he had been sitting there, or if he had dreamed the appearance of his wife.

A pot was already boiling when he came inside. Familiar smells greeted him. It had been some time since he'd eaten food that felt real and wholesome. Richard's stomach turned with hunger.

"It'll be done in thirty minutes or so," Gwen said over her shoulder. Richard reached for his beard and scratched it. For the first time in months, he wondered what he looked like. His wife wore a blouse tucked into her ankle pants, looking prim and proper in contrast to the unkept beach house and likely his own appearance.

"Can I help?" His voice was pensive, almost formal.

Gwen shook her head but then looked at him.

"I had to leave my suitcase in the car. Could you grab it? I'm parked at the edge of the beach, where the road ends." She dug a car key from her pocket and dropped it into his hand. "Bring an umbrella if you have it. It might rain."

Outside, the wind had started to die, and the sky was losing all light. The rain soaked him as he made his way towards the road that led to town. Where it ended, their small black Beetle was parked. She must have driven it here herself. The thought made him feel a strange sense of pride, even though it was his fault she'd come all this way.

He opened the trunk. She had only packed a small suitcase. Whatever she was planning, Gwen only intended to stay for a few days. He tried to gauge from the size of her suitcase how angry she was with him. The smaller the case, the greater her spite. She didn't get angry in the usual way. Hers was a quiet rage, almost imperceptible, but potent. She held no grudges, spoke no unkind words. She believed nonsense usually worked itself out in the end, and she only waited until it had. Stupidity, in her mind, lasted for a season, so what was the point in arguing? He felt it was all too terribly sensible. He knew some wives threw plates, or argued, or grew silent, and so to wait, to wait until somebody realizes their own errors with embarrassment, did not seem natural. She did not nag him for his frequent trips to write or his forgetfulness or his, at times, impulsive reclusiveness. She was always there when he came home, keeping things in perfect order.

Maybe, tonight, she would let him have it. She would grow angry,

and her perfectly pressed blouse would wrinkle, and she would raise her voice at his stupidity. The thought made him smile, despite himself.

* * *

“I’ll bring this upstairs.” Richard said after he’d stepped inside, his clothes dripping.

“Thank you.” She didn’t look up at him. He passed her to get to the stairs and smelled her perfume. He never knew what it was, never asked, and though he’d seen the bottle countless times, he never looked at it. He’d forgotten its existence until now.

Upstairs he set the suitcase down at the foot of his bed, and then picked up the cracked mirror on his dresser. He rubbed the dust from it with the sleeve of his shirt. His own gray eyes stared back at him, but the rest of him looked strange. A little ragged and wild. A little older. His beard and hair had grown considerably. A strange panic filled him, one he immediately swallowed. He dug through his drawers for a shirt that had fewer wrinkles and a pair of slacks. How long had it been?

His own gray eyes started back at him, but the rest of him looked strange.

The stairs creaked beneath his weight as he returned downstairs. It was growing darker, but Gwen had lit a few kerosene lamps and placed them on the table. He tried to conceal some of his excitement over a real meal, something he never had the patience to make for himself. She was still bringing things to the table – bread, butter, a pot of coffee. Her hair was shorter now, to her chin, and he found it endlessly adorable.

“Thank you,” Richard said when she had brought everything out. He wasn’t sure what else to say.

“You’re welcome,” she said, sitting down with a good-natured sigh.

They said a prayer and ate, at first in silence, because both were

hungry. Soon, though, they were stealing glances at each other until finally his eyes found hers directly. She sipped some water and let the silence go on a little longer. They were still friends. She made this clear to him even without speaking.

“*How’s Richard?*” she began. “It’s the first question your publisher asks me when he calls. But of course, what he really means is *When is Richard going to finish his book?* And I, of course, dutiful wife that I am, plead for more time.” Richard’s gaze dropped. “I don’t know how much sweet talking I’m actually capable of. Apparently, not much. Two days ago, he threatened to drop you. So here I am. Oh, I forgot.” She walked over to the brown paper bag and pulled out a bottle of whisky. “I’m sure you’ve had none of this here,” she said, smiling with false sweetness and grabbing two glasses from the cupboard. She poured a glass and handed it to him.

“So how long did he give me?” His fingers grazed hers when he took the glass.

“Two weeks. He wants whatever you have, even if it’s terrible. He needs proof you’ve been writing.” She sat down and poured herself some whisky and considered the glass.

“Do you need proof?” Richard’s eyes searched her.

“That you’ve been writing? No.” She took a thoughtful sip and swallowed. “I would have appreciated *something*, however, to let me know how you’ve been doing all this time.”

Richard lowered his drink and his forehead creased. She sighed, realizing he was unable to work it out on his own.

“It’s been ten months, Richard.” she said. He blinked several times.

“It hasn’t,” he said.

“Yes, it has. Nearly eleven, actually.” He reached for his beard, recalling now how he had arrived here a clean-shaven man. “You’re acquiring a status of notoriety, though. I hear your name often:

Richard Davis, who found some harlot by the seashore; Richard Davis, who left the country; Richard Davis, who was too much of a coward to ask for a divorce.” She chuckled. “It’d be sad if it wasn’t so amusing.”

“I’m sorry.” Richard stared down at his food. It was still so warm in his bowl. He missed food like this. He missed her, and he didn’t know what to do about it.

She nodded. “I know you are. You’ve just had some spell cast over you – I can see that. You don’t *look* healthy, Richard. I can hardly be angry with someone who’s wasting away.”

He swallowed some whisky grimly. “You’re exaggerating.”

“Yes, a hyperbole for the great Richard Davis.” Her voice was dramatic one moment and earnest the next. “Nothing has been put on pause, you know. The world is changing. I am too, and you’re missing all of it. I used to cut out newspaper clippings of things you would find interesting when you got back, but now I’ve thrown them all away. There were too many.”

Richard looked at her. He didn’t know what he should do or could do. He didn’t know how to explain himself.

“I missed your birthday.” The realization came to him slowly. She shrugged.

“I liked your gift.” She fidgeted with her blouse to reveal a simple gold chain.

“Good.” He cleared his throat.

There was a short pause. Neither spoke, and in their silence, they heard the distant waves crawling towards the shore. Both Gwen’s hands were clasped against her glass. She’d had very little of her own drink.

“I’m leaving in the morning,” she said. “I’d like to stay here tonight.”

“Of course.” She looked as if she might say more but instead she took the dishes and washed them briskly. He helped dry them and put them in the cupboard. They felt like old friends then. He knew she felt it, too, their movements an ordinary and familiar dance.

“Gwen,” he said at last, when the dishes were finished. She looked at him. “I like your hair.”

She laughed, clutching at it absently.

He knew she felt it, too, their movements an ordinary and familiar dance.

“Behave.” She kissed him on the cheek and then hugged him in a cursory kind of way, like she wasn’t ready to reveal how much she’d missed him. He could tell, though, and it pained him. She headed upstairs to his room.

He had another drink alone and at the table, watching the liquid pour from bottle to glass. He couldn’t tell her how far his novel was from being finished. He despised everything he’d written but couldn’t leave yet. Writing at home and within the daily rhythm of life was impossible for him. He did not know why it had to be the sea. Perhaps he wanted his final novel to be about something larger than he, or because he suspected it might be this great metaphor that could be used to examine all the things in life he wondered about and feared.

He was starting to forget things the way his father had. His father, who had forgotten everything and everyone in the end, and sat with his mouth slack and eyes unfocused for the final years of his life. Richard had made a point of visiting his childhood home where his mother took care of him. Now, sitting in the living room, he felt he was looking into his future. Something of his father was there, he liked to think. He was trapped, though, and fading, and Richard was powerless in the face of it.

Richard lately and often forgot what he was writing mid-sentence. He knew that, if finished, it would be his last novel. His attention span would perhaps allow for shorter things- poetry, short stories,

essays. He would get on, somehow. But this novel – he intended to pour everything into it. He would be useless, eventually. He wouldn't remember how to chew or drive. There was no way of knowing when, and whether he and Gwen would reach old age, or if he would sink into vacancy of mind before then. He longed to find a way to make himself understood, even as he slipped into unintelligibility and confusion. Being inarticulate was perhaps his greatest fear.

He had to tell Gwen. Each day seemed to insist this of him in the last few years, when it slowly became evident his forgetfulness was more than a characteristic of his, but he hadn't the words yet, or a plan. He felt himself drifting a bit further from her, his life, and himself.

Richard slept on the floor of the bedroom while Gwen fell asleep in his bed. It was too small for both of them, but they lay awake, talking. He'd missed the cadence of her voice as she told him what he had missed – things of note and mundane things she knew he would want to know. Their life in the city was simple, but she made it sound beautiful. She made him miss it. He stared at the ceiling for a long time, a little drunk and a little guilty. It all lulled him into a dream-like state.

It'll be about the sea, he remembered telling her, all that time ago. *A novel that is just about the sea, Gwen, and the people who live by it.*

She listened. *What else?*

Well, I'll figure out the rest when I start writing it. There was no good way of saying, *It will be everything I want to say to you, Gwen, and the world, before the words escape me.*

He had asked her to come with him, back when he thought he would be there for a few months. Gwen's mother had grown ill, though, and she wouldn't leave her behind.

Alright. Write your novel, and then come back.

She'd said this before he kissed her and hopped on the train that brought him to this cove. He'd been disgustingly happy to leave, to

write, and with her blessing, to be gone from the noises of the city and daily responsibilities.

He lay on the warped floor, thinking of all of this with a feeling of dread. The window by the bed was cracked open. He could smell the salt in the air and hear waves crashing. This had been his daily symphony, washing his mind clean every evening. The whisky in his system still buzzed. He rose, making efforts to do so quietly, but the floor creaked with his every movement. He glanced at his wife, whose eyes opened with the noise. He was trapped under her microscopic gaze, under eyes that could see through him even in the dark.

"Hey," he said. The room was tilting under his feet.

She sat up, hugging her knees. Behind her, moonlight came through the window, cutting her silhouette in a way that obscured her face.

"I told myself not to ask." One of her hands grabbed at a portion of the quilt on the bed and bunched it. "But how long will you stay here?"

"I'm not sure."

She sighed, letting out what he knew was only a little of the frustration she harbored "I wish you'd write at home, Richard, where I can bring you coffee and talk to you, but I know that you'd never agree to this. Even now, I see you thinking about what to say next to me, as if you are writing dialogue and not talking to your wife, because you won't come home with me tomorrow. You just don't know how to say it yet. You must write, Richard, I know this about you. But you must also live. I can't do without you." She swung her legs over the edge of the mattress and stood. "I can't sleep. I'm going to leave." She hesitated a moment and then grabbed her suitcase at the foot of the bed. Richard didn't stop her. His mouth felt dry and his head dizzy.

The words finally came out. "I do love you, Gwen." She shut the suitcase, smiling sadly.

“I know.” She came over and kissed his cheek and he saw that she’d been crying. She patted his arm affectionately and went downstairs. Richard heard the stairs creak and the front door shut.

He had accomplished nothing here and resented himself for it. He thought the time here would amount to some kind of magnum opus, a token for the world to remember him by. For a while, he stood in that room. Then he went downstairs and filled a glass with water from the sink. He slid a coat over his pale blue pajamas. He didn’t bother with shoes before stepping outside and onto the sand.

He approached the edge of the sea, glass in hand. It was black under the starless sky. He had tried many times to capture its moods, but feared he lacked the talent. He seemed always to reach for that beyond his grasp, instead of embracing what was within it. Gwen had always had her feet firmly planted in the real world. She’d wanted a baby, and when this seemed impossible for them, she wanted to adopt. She paid close attention to the people in their lives. She paid attention to life as if it were her favorite novel and he loved her for it. He wondered if she would leave him if he stayed here, or if his novel would ever be finished. He felt unable to live and unable to write, and it all made him feel raw like the rough salt of the sea. A wave unfurled before him, the water reaching his feet.

She paid attention to life as if it were her favorite novel and he loved her for it.

“You win.” His voice was quiet, unheard by even himself over the crashing waves.

Perhaps it was the lingering whisky, or perhaps he was thinking more clearly than he had in many months. Perhaps he wanted a new birth. He set his glass down on the sand, shed his coat, and stepped into the

water. He waded in deep, his teeth chattering from the cold, until the water was neck high. He submerged into the dark waters and his entire body jolted with wakefulness. He surfaced, catching his breath and bobbing with the current. His eyes darted back towards the cottage. From the water, he could see that the black Beetle still at the end of the lane. His chest tightened. *She hasn’t left me quite yet,*

he thought. Maybe she was waiting for Richard to come after her, or maybe she was hesitant to go. It didn’t matter. In that moment, he resolved to go with her. He resolved to go home.

A wave toppled overhead and when it passed, he spat out the water that had collected in his mouth. He laughed suddenly, a twisted laugh, because he didn’t know how to swim, or morbidly wondered if he forgotten. He thought of his feet, his toes only barely scrabbling the ocean’s floor. He began making uncertain strokes towards the shore, grimacing at his pathetic movements and the impulsivity that had caused him to wade in. *What a stupid way to die. Absolutely embarrassing.* Embarrassment more than anything else compelled him to make bolder strokes, and soon, his feet were firmly planted on the ocean’s bottom and he could make slow steps towards the shore. In some time, he was at the ocean’s edge, collapsing in the sand, which clung thick to his clothes. He lay there until he caught his breath.

the people behind the work

Elsie Abrahamson is senior Media Art major. She went to India once, always has snacks around, and can be found doing stand up comedy at the Coffee Hag.

Ethan Becker is a sophomore at Bethany Lutheran College, who among other things, is the President of the BLC Write! Club, a member of the Scroll, Jazz Band, Concert Band, and Student Senate.

Michael Bless is currently in his senior year at Bethany studying Media Art. He is highly concerned with authenticity and honesty within his work. Rural imagery plays a huge part in his works of writing, mostly due to the fact that he grew up on a farm and feels as if he took his childhood on the farm for granted.

Emma Bloedel is a junior at Bethany Lutheran College and is currently pursuing a degree in Studio Art. She enjoys drawing, singing, dancing, but most of all, she enjoys painting. She loves to share what she enjoys doing with others.

Hans Bloedel is a sub-par poet, but has a good personality. He is a current student at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota still living off the fame of his previous masterpiece, "Ode to a Shamrock Shake."

Hannah Bockoven is a Bethany alumna who majored in English and minored in Sociology. She works at Bethany as the International Student Activity Coordinator and enjoys babysitting, books, and good conversation. She plans to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing.

Madelaine Cordes is an artist who specializes in everything from graphic design to painting to photography. She is currently a senior pursuing a degree in Graphic Design.

Hannah Dosch is a freshman at Bethany. Majoring in Literary Analysis. An outlier from the English major norm, Hannah plays softball which gives her a break from all the reading and writing she does and sometimes inspires her poetry.

Ezekiel Grabau is a Bethany student, a pastor's son, and a lifelong storyteller. He is at Bethany studying English and Psychology because he loves learning, especially about language and people. He intends to use the insights he's gained for the ministry, which is the vocation he's felt called to since he was a little kid riding around in his Pa's car visiting shut-ins and hearing their stories.

Karee Henrich is a senior Graphic Design major with a minor in Studio Art. If she ever seems to be missing, she can likely be found working on designs, making mugs, or watching M*A*S*H*.

Emma Hislop is a recent Bethany graduate in Graphic Design, minoring in Studio Art and emphasizing in Media Arts. She currently works as a Graphic Artist at Navitor in North Mankato but spends her free time creating in any medium she can get her hands on (primarily video, graphics, painting, or sculpture).

Heather Juedes is currently a sophomore at Bethany Lutheran College studying Broad Field Social Studies. She has always had a passion for writing, which stems from her love of reading. Some of her favorite works are the Harry Potter and Percy Jackson series. Heather never thought of writing poetry until she had to for an exam at Bethany. Without the exam, and the encouragement of her friends Anna and Liz, Heather would not be writing poetry – much less submitting it to be published.

Sydney Kappel is a sophomore at Bethany Lutheran College who is majoring in Multimedia Writing. She really enjoys reading a good psychological thriller, but she'll read almost anything thrown at her. You can most likely find her at the library nearest you.

Jacob Kempfert is a painfully realistic author residing around the bend of a river. He takes his studies seriously, goes to bed at 8pm, and stays up far afterward, conversing with the stories in his head. When not avidly studying, he reads in the library (and works on occasion too).

Emily Kimball is a Bethany alum and professor in the Theatre department. This is her 7th year as the Costume designer. Her favorite items of fashion history are Edwardian blouses, sock garters, 100% wool fabric, and gigantic hats. When not making costumes she's probably knitting or watching mid-2000s RomComs.

Doris Lyu is a photography lover from Quanzhou, China, trying to showcase the beautiful side of the world.

Laura Marzolf is a sophomore studying Psychology. She enjoys writing for fun and being involved in the choir and musicals. After college, Laura is hoping to continue to write poetry and go to graduate school for a masters in counseling.

Eleonore Mumme is a writer from southern Minnesota who finds most of her inspiration for poetry and prose anywhere else but Minnesota. Her work has been published in memoryhouse and Dragon Poet Review, and when she is not writing (which is nearly always the case), she bakes and works as an Admissions Counselor at Bethany Lutheran College.

Amber Murry is currently a sophomore at Bethany, majoring in English in the Multimedia Writing Track with a minor in Spanish. She enjoys writing down out-of-context quotes from her friends and family to use for later inspiration in her writing. One of her current favorites is, "I let you live, because you know what a spoon is."

Sarah Oas is a senior at Bethany, majoring in Studio Art. She enjoys various art forms, such as drawing and graphic design, and especially focuses on oil portraiture. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing an occasional short story, and stressing over her inadequate plans for entry into the "real world."

Ian Overn is double majoring in English and Media Arts, set to graduate in 2021. Intending to go into Chemistry when he first arrived at BLC, he figured that it was probably a good idea to go into a field he actually enjoyed and switched majors after one semester. Now, he's determined to hone his writing skills to a professional level and thrilled to have the privilege to do things like write poetry instead of real homework.

Mindy Pitzner is a sophomore at Bethany studying Studio Art and Art History.

Emeline Ring is a Washington state native whose perfect day consists of camping out in a Starbucks and devouring a book for hours on end. Though she loves her home, she came to Bethany to major in English. When she isn't devoting her time to writing, reading, and editing for class or her own pleasure, she tries to carve out time for outdoor runs (even when it's raining), singing in choir, and listening to movie and TV soundtracks.

Matthew Skifton is a junior studying Media Arts. He likes listening to any type of music he can get his hands on, as well as drawing and playing video games. While listening to music, he walks from place to place imagining scenarios to put into his art.

Maren Thompson is a junior at Bethany Lutheran College double majoring in English and Theatre. She is overworked, overtired, and underfed. Art is her reprieve from all of this.

Sophia Weisensel is a senior Studio Art major who dabbles in creative writing. She enjoys and excels at painting, thrift shopping, and eating Chinese food, and is looking forward to attending the New York Academy of Art this fall, where she can continue doing all of the above.



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