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SING, WOMAN!

by

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2015

Thesis

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for the degree of

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Creative Writing

Sing, Woman!

Chairperson: Edward Skoog

Sing, Woman!

Emma Spencer

Poems

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ACT ONE: LIP SERVICE

Firestarter

Blood from my cervix
congealed in my pubic hair.
My boss said “something seems off”
and let me hide in the break room.

I settled, clutching my abdomen
as my uterus tried to murder my day
for being without child
a disproportionate response
whyyyyyyyy meeeeeeeeeee?

Eating might help?

Stand up, imprecise posture. Movement
was horrible and my stomach revolted, anger seeping
via osmosis from my dead ovum. I heaved,
my bile colored light pink via

two multivitamins
I barely remembered to take
before I left the house.

I bought a croissant and ginger ale, ate the pastry
and then a chaser: two Ibuprofen, two-hundred milligrams each.
My boss offered me conciliatory bing cherries and said
“you’re not wearing your usual lipstick,
that’s probably not helping”

I slicked on the matte red color I left in my purse.
As above, so below.

Pop of color

If lipstick then woman
If lipstick then darling
If lipstick then highlight
If lipstick then smile
If lipstick then match
If lipstick then dare
If lipstick then notice
If lipstick then flush
If lipstick then who
If lipstick then blood
If lipstick then woman
If lipstick then spots
If lipstick then attention
If lipstick then teeth
If lipstick then eyes
If lipstick then smack
If lipstick then dry
If lipstick then fearless
If lipstick then lines
If lipstick then care
If lipstick then blur
If lipstick then stretch
If lipstick then woman
If lipstick then blind
If lipstick then what

Third Lady

One of my fraternity sisters recently had a hysterectomy
to end the agony of endometriosis. Painless, blessedly.
I'm filled with envy and delight for her, the latter mostly.

My sister-in-law is pregnant with her first child;
I'll be Auntie Em, cooing softly at the sight.
Baby Beloved, sparkly eyes open wide.

Lonely on a Saturday night, I call my mother
but she doesn't answer. I don't want my father,
and my sister's abroad; quiet. I'm no lover.

Singe

Did I ask you to comment on my breasts?
At what point did it seem like I would be
receptive to NICE TITS
during this transaction of time and money?
Do you say this to all the women you see?
Are you drunk - and you're buying more beer?
Is this normal for you?
Are you going to harass more women in the street?
Does my discomfort please you?
Or did you think it would please me
to hear about my ample bosom from a stranger?
If I were a dragon, I'd torch you for that.

Fire cannot kill a valkyrie

What is it you want - held
by mother lifted by father
wandering in fields you've never seen
up the mountain down the ledge
Don't look back
what is it you want
Brünnhilde burdened her steed
with Sieglinde burdened with unbornchild
you are running you want to help her
but can you really
who will you carry whose waiting arms will you
run into help me help me
silver flashing through storms
Cold so cold
cloudbornsteel cut your chains
you can start again with nothing
nothing can't leave chain welts can't burn
who cares if father rages
if mother is cold
run you are going too far and now
you are caught
reforged *what is it you want*
wake up and then you have eyes only
for one
the purest possibly pulled from the woods
one is for you and you will be two
are you willing to dive into that feeling
retune to one sharp to risk too risky
you cannot be burnt you are too singed already
reborn to love and lose yourself in lovemad

Close

Trace my pale palm with your thumb
you not knowing the pattern
circular becoming hexagonal
trace my lines trace my lips
mute me with you
lace my fingers in yours
stick together sing together
don't go don't go it's not yet dawn
the stars are still out

Mother sounds

She opens her mouth and pearly tones come forth,
warmly filing the hall as she leans into the shell of the piano.
She's gently swaying in her own ecstasy of the song
while holding our gazes, almost daring us to look away.
She crafts her phrases with trills and turns and shifts
as carefully as I craft a poem.
Her open vowels
cut through the air, diamondbright.
But when she's alone by the fire
glass of red wine beside her as she grades
I would think her a librarian,
so quiet.

Fuchsia

1. It's my most popular color among customers. High rate of compliments. Even got a customer survey saying I have nice lipstick because of it.
2. It's the brightest color I own. "All things merry and bright," you know.
3. It fits my vibe. Have you looked at all the pink accessories I have with me nowadays?
4. It's crafted by my favorite American fashion designer, in collaboration with my favorite brand of drugstore makeup.
5. It stays on pretty well, even with all the liquids I consume during regular daytime hours.
6. It doesn't dry me out.
7. It doesn't need constant reapplication.
8. It's fucking pretty.

Uptight

how's my color
it's a little patchy
you might want to touch up
just a little before we go out

oh my gaaaaaahd
can you be any slower
I don't care
that you're friends
walk in formation
or there's no point in
being lined up

let's go round three
make round vowels
big bright eyes
 bright red
 I wonder if you can see it
 out there

SON OF A BITCH

I don't have the right lipstick here
well don't sweat it

I almost missed the fourth entrance
in "Fum Fum Fum" last time
can't let that happen
can't dry up
need lipstick to give me
something to focus on
a pop of color against concert black
 we gotta go
 we gotta go
 we gotta go

 but I'm patchy
 no don't
 I'll just pat it on
 fill the gaps
 get back in line

now it looks like a highlight makes your lips look bright
not how I wanted it to be but we're on stage now
there's no going back to find the right color

I just figured out that it was in my other pocket

Rage Against the Mozart

I cannot sing a
Mass For the Dead
with a Dead so close
so there

call one not okay; call two no more pain

That bassoon solo, so longing so lush
I am not ready
I cannot sing this
I cannot focus
leave me alone

Mass For the Slightly Inconvenienced:
I am expelling blood
from my cervix
and I have a twenty-page paper
due next Friday
and three concerts
to sing this weekend and now this.
Am I fine? Doubtful. Have I
cried? Certainly.

Why this Requiem
destruction?
no sobs clawing out of my throat for Fauré
or Rutter
I voluntarily listened to JN
sing Verdi's *Lacrimosa*
soft wetting
not wrecking my mascara
forget the liner because
I'm uncoordinated
and my wings are never even
so I always resemble a raccoon
headlit ghostlit

Fuck this Sanctus but specifically this iteration
of the Hosanna
because if I wanted a tricky fugue
I would have gone for any JS Bach
or *Ein Deutsches Requiem*
or the last bit of Beethoven 9 before the soloists
reemerge and D major is too happy

here and it's the one movement I legitimately
have to practice when doing the WAM
Requiem but of course this is Süssmayr here
so it always feels weird to call it
part of this work but I can almost forgive him
with how lovely the following Benedictus is but still
Fuck this Sanctus

Study with the recording when Mother was Solo S
because I was there and I love her and Bernstein takes it
too slow

call one hospital; call two no more pain

Lacrimosa hurts most now
for two grandparents gone and the last work I sang
under NNR
this Requiem hurts I'm not ready
I need a deep dark breath engage the lower abdominals
and flare out the ribcage
make NNR and JN and Mother and DT proud

To sing is to expel this
To write is to expel this
To drink is to bathe in and then expel this
mute with tea
now to sing this Mass For the Dead

WAM why so many Alto Tritones and Soprano Screams?
are you conjuring the Devil to shield
you from ghosts coming your way
shield me too

I am coming back to sing this in moonlight
hope for no more pain make art as chaser
cry now make art

Outspoken

Emma used to have only three lip colors - a mundane unnamed nude, Pink Wink, and Plum Pout. Emma was told she had good skin so she never bothered with foundation, only eyes and lips in Michigan. Emma saw more colors on beautiful people and bought some new colors after Plum Pout wore out. Emma found Prowler and Pitch Black. (Emma's leery of Pitch Black and how it fades and how it catches on teeth.) Emma was given Mightiest Maraschino. When Emma move to Montana, she wanted to do something different and offset her red cheeks so Emma got properly foundation matched and then she saw all the other lip colors. Emma found Exhibition. Emma found Outspoken. Emma found As You Want, Victoria. Emma found Firestarter. Emma found Fuchsia. Emma found Ursula. Emma found Cake. Emma found Sassy Mauve. Emma was given Red and Raspberry Tea. Emma found Singe. Emma found Panko. Emma found Notorious. Emma found Crave. Emma found Tutu. Emma found XOX. Emma found Crush. Emma found Nudist. Emma found Queen. Emma found Morning After. Emma found Uptight. Emma found joy. Emma found love in her mirror. Emma wants more colors.

Sassy Mauve

at least make
a pun of some sort
or use a more
loquacious adjective
than fucking “sassy.”
you’re better than this.
be more creative.
(hire me to create your
lipstick names,
I’m begging you.)

Ursula

I'd rather go out with *something* on my face
especially when the wind bites.

I don't wear makeup to please anyone,
and I've never had bad skin
outside of the occasional stress zit -
I just prefer an even tone,
with maybe a dash of rosiness
in my cheeks. Simple skin.

I'm running behind
but at least I look cute.
My lips are garnets
glittering in the sunlight.

Do Ursula proud;
pucker up and
make those lips sparkle.

Now if I could just
not catch my hair
in my lipstick
everything would be
peachy.

pure white teeth

thin lips

journalist

therapist

lyric coloratura soprano

Catholic

waist-length blonde hair

size 10 feet

missus

baby of the family

anti-feminist

mother of three

Self Portrait in Negatives

wholly heterosexual

unstabilized teeth

Brazilian waxed vulva

button nose

only child

curly red hair

tied fallopian tubes

overfilled lips

Methodist

Hollywood actress

published

ballerina

unchanging

Musetta

I want
an opera with a libretto
in which

a woman is not raped and gone mad as consequence

doesn't die of consumption
or a broken heart
or homophony of the two

doesn't fall in love *molto subito*
because of a man's kiss

and doesn't die for
not submitting to a man's lust.

the sun rises
over the mountains.
Everything is Lesbians.

Gorgeous wild-maned girls and women
singing across their full vocal spectrum
all coloratura, beautiful bel canto arias
the chorus is all women and no one has to wear a false moustache
and only pants for those who want to wear them

the choral numbers are not insipid things
no "Climbing over rocky mountain"
or "Three little maids from school are we"

let there be a sextet of women discussing how best to expose
45's crimes against women
while drinking from a barrel of cabernet
horned helmets optional

let there be a hella polyphonic first act finale in which
everyone is complaining about the beauty standards
enforced by the male gaze and internalized misogyny
and mezzos take the melody or no dice

if witches bitches and britches
then an all-powerful goddess-witch with the world beneath her heel
"yaaaaaasssssss bitch"
and the comfiest britches

Queen

Her trademark was Red Lipstick. When I told her that I got my first Red Lipstick after my first year of knowing her, she was so proud. Like me, she has the Pale Skin Dark Bobbed Hair aesthetic, so bold-colored lipsticks look amazing on her. She also cosplays as Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* and Pam Poovey from *Archer* so she does not take anyone's shit in or out of costume. We have the same voice type and sang in choral ensembles together for two years before she graduated. Her mid-range is gorgeous. I embraced her Pale Skin Dark Bobbed Hair and Momfriendisms and try to make them my own, but I owe her a lot. Her voice is just as beautiful as her lips and I owe a lot of my fearlessness about lipstick to her. Bright colored lips when you're wearing something basic? Yeah, she taught me that. Bright Red Lipstick when you're singing in the choir on the back of the stage? Yeah, she taught me that. Lipstick and mezzo-soprano sorority are our bonds. We are Transcontinental Lipstick Queens. *Regina tremendae majestatis.*

ACT TWO: MIRRORING

Three Translations of Jean Follain

I. Life

A child is born
into a vastness
given fifty years
to turn to nothing, a soldier corpsed
We saw him
as he settled
a bag of redgreenblush apples
two or three escaped the sack
a noise amidst worldly noise
where larks sang
on a stone threshold.

II. The Beast

Nestled in a flat
guarded by vinethorncovered trails
lives a Beast
who wants nothing of the world -
her rooms are condensed and conjoined,
her doors close
and when dusk rolls in
she scents the acacias.
She carries the whole species of Beast
inside herself.

III. The Egg

The wisewoman caresses an egg
with a corner of today's apron;
the egg, heavy with ivory promise,
that is hers only (precious).
She looks at goldtreed Autumn
from her skylight
and it's framed like a painting
nothing
unseasoned.
The frangible egg
cradled in her palm
is still fresh.

Baba the Turk

Behold my ankles, the light dusting of hair that matches everything. Behold my Velma Dinkley bob; jinkies! Behold my green-hazel eyes, watch the colors change as I move from the pitch chill night to fluorescent lighting. Behold my cleavage mole; Marie Antoinette would find it fashionable in the right gown. Behold my lips, sheathed in hot pink Urban Decay. Behold, I've become a lipstick queen. Behold my fingers, tapping out "Hello Bitches" by CL. Behold the tiny swirling hairs on my toe knuckles. Behold my chin hair, grown in as I stressed out, soon to be sliced away. Behold my pants with the zippers closing nothing, the outer layer of protection to my furred vulva. Dammed up and she'll stay that way. Behold.

Don't take me back to Mount Pleasant

I claim a mountain desire
but never climbed a mountain
save "Climbing Over Rocky Mountain"
in bare feet and swimming costume
down the aisle in Staples Hall
to our imagined beach
I fashioned a crown of sand

I'm longing to see this space
from atop Mount Sentinel or Jumbo

Antonym: Flat Irritating. It was never
the place I could call a forever home
its misnomer could not hold
and lake-effect snow is fucking cold
I miss Mother

from here, Montana, I miss
her and Father
equidistant

when I spy the Rockies
or Cascades from aerial descent,
restrain my singing impulse
but I know this is home, here

Morning After

What time is it? Ah, there's my alarm.

Let's see if a shower helps - nope, still dizzy. Still aching bones. Fuck.

I gotta call in to work - I can't stay awake.

I can't stay upright, feverbound.

Am I trying to cough up a lung? Maybe. I'm running out of DayQuil.

What's this doing here? Oh well, it'll hydrate my lips. It's simple and it won't stain my pillow because it's so sheer.

Back into pajamas, back into the blanket burrito.

Make it stop, make me better.

The Composer

The black, the white, all keys are struck by hands;
allegro agitato almost passed
for tempo in my mind, the facts be damned –
I've never played the thing, just let it pass.
A torment, torture, *forte*, tempest wild
is heard, a C minor exposition.
The gifted youth, not seeking music mild
but bold and raging, *molto espressivo*.
But soft, here is the slow *cantabile*;
a gentle rondo, almost like a dream.
Two lovers dancing in the park. There they sway,
crescendoing to kiss in moonlight's gleam.
Piano music inspires the mind's race
and this sonata is an ideal case.

This isn't easy, so don't make it harder on me

A SUMMER STROLL

*why doesn't the bus go
all the way up
she holds a hard cider
against her cleavage line*

AFTER A FALL

a woman needs
a good angle to capture
the image of the break
rotate to the right

ON IBUPROFEN 325

she holds on the pillow
elevated and iced
sleep no dreams
laid out with no one watching

AFTER A REHEARSAL

*it's not that I don't appreciate it
but I don't want people knowing
where I live
at the bottom of the river*

IN THE MORNING MIST

a woman passes by
babysteps across the ice
as her lipstick mattifies in the wind

FORGOTTEN

and she regrets
and she regrets
and she holds it in her stomach
this is fine

DRIVING

goodbye hottub
goodbye mother
goodbye homeland
goodbye spiraltree
goodbye twinbed
goodbye gasstove
goodbye surgery
goodbye recital gown
goodbye bathtub

CLEARANCE

she exhales a smile

Not the Austen novel

almost Lon

for a man two generations back

I've met twice in Colorado

maybe once in Washington

but mother said no

and I wasn't a boy

brought to England by a queen mother

A Norman

taking whole universality

to a ruling capacity

so few derivatives

because it is a derivative

of ancient Ermengarde

which almost has

the same suffix as Hildegard Von Bingen

whose feast day is ten days before

my birthday

she has a recipe for "happiness cookies" I've been

itching to try

she wrote the first "opera"

so she's kind of my favorite abbess

one proper saint

and three beatified women

which is to say they are saints

in all but name and one more miracle

says Catholicism

when people prayed to Goriano in 1943 she caused

a six-foot deluge of snow and stopped

a frontline battle movement

Bremen's right hand which she used to help the needy

never crumbled as a corpse

Gurk is a patron against eye problems and disease

and offers hope for a happy birth

Üffing was a nurse-nun in WWII

father and mother say it felt right

when I emerged

mother says

it's a derivative of Amelia

from her and her mother

almost Hermia but
mother said no
almost a Gabrielle
which would have yielded
two French names followed by an English surname
I'm not French enough

soprano Albani
chef Bengtsson
model Ellingsen
poet Embury
X-Man Frost
activist González
Lady Hamilton
Queen of Hawaii
Lady Gaga's keytar
actress Miyazawa
Queen of the Netherlands
paleontologist Richter
actress Roberts
Victorian Romance
Baby Spice
actress Stone
actress Thompson
actress Watson

mother says there was a tradition
to alternate Hermia and Mary in
the firstborn daughter's name in
each generation but that I am not
obligated to a Hermia

there was a third contender

A week late and I still won't be able to come

Dear Baby this is Hello
Dear Baby this is your world
Dear Baby love
Dear Baby say Hello
Dear Baby you are loved
Dear Baby you are a worry
Dear Baby you are fine
Dear Baby you are coming soon
Dear Baby I am coming soon
Dear Baby we are ready
Dear Baby could you please
Dear Baby when are you
Dear Baby Welcome

Lullaby for one

The *ostinato* of my breathing
reminds me that I am
alone
in the dark and
the stuffed rabbit I loosely clutch
is no substitute for human warmth
but it's the best I've got.
I cocoon myself in pastel blankets
and cue up the recording of my mother
singing the aria from *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*
and imagine that I am back
in her womb,
confined but content,
the humming I hear now
as soothing as it must have been
before I came into the world.

The Gingerbread Witch

I stared in the mirror and
wanted me with emerald anime eyes;
wanted Velma Kelly hair, not Velma Dinkley hair;
wanted my chin to be smaller with a defined jawline;
wanted a perfect hourglass figure, waist cutting in sharp
wanted to be sheathed in rosy black lace
wanted wanted wanted wanted wanted

(Look straight at the you
in the bathroom mirror,
lit up with rosy cheeks
and diamond white teeth.

Look at you looking at you.

Look at me looking at me.)

wanted turning to needing
and a mirror is a dream,
an alternate space
untouchable.

I want Her, that doppelgänger
I want to be, to come through
and shake me out

(Look around, do you see
anyone else?

Where is your mother?

Where is your father?

Why are you alone?

Who do you love but you?)

until I don't want anymore
because I would have
what I want. Her.

(What is the nightmare?)

She smashes through me
into shards, bleeding
and pained but smiling.

She wants to swallow me whole
but I turn back, an empty black hole,
and eat her eyes like matcha bonbons,
lick my fingers at the sweetness
muddled by my own bitter saliva.

I want to slide on my red lipstick,
smile and say *I've made a mess*
but it's done now.

Tap twice to turn off

Count twenty-seven inhale/exhales before you lose interest and/or a need to focus close your eyes close your eyes the Moon's still out and you should be dreaming but now you're waking mourning loss of sleep mourning loss of Your Dream Lover

Your hair's more up than your mind you grimace at your squinty eyes and rumpled shirt goodbye shirt goodbye pants oh fuck is that blood is it that time your breasts tingle with chill and pain solidarity with Her and that's your rationale for why it's time but a day early you were on time says your mother you wish Her Child had been on time but Her Child has their own plans and you know nothing about childbirth outside of sex ed so you want it easy

In your dream there were stars and nothing hurt

You consider packing a lunch you used to do that as a child get up first and prepare then drive to school to pout and pluck your bass guitar decaffeinated because there were no coffee shops on the way to school but now you're miserable without warmth without two shots of espresso without a smile and a how are you this morning you're fine you skip packing lunch because who has time to match tupperware and cram pizza inside just to make it soggy when reheated so you don't even want it Your Dream Lover would prod you to do it so you can save up for that extra buttery popcorn on date night at the movies there's a reason Your Dream Lover doesn't exist too idealistic open your eyes open your eyes and squint into the snow low visibility don't slip going down stairs

You scurry to the bus and glance down for the time close your eyes close your eyes you have a few minutes

If you can hear this then you know who I am

I wonder who can hear me; not a soprano
but I've been hushed *you're too loud*, no shame in sharp
diction and clear consonants. jostle the walls

song bird big bird *green finch and linnet-bird*. imagine
if it were not obvious that I am a lady, if I were an ungendered
amorphous lump of suffering. yawping at the moon

spend Saturdays dozing on bonewhite pillows. in college, I yelled at petite roommate
on her birthday, cantankerously, at 3 AM; she knew
I had a morning voice lesson but she was drunk and rowdy. go to fucking sleep

now we are wolves not adjacent as rabbits. they literally
die of loneliness and I worry about Holly (the one on Magnolia
but also my sister). mountain passages parting

humming songs I halfremember, repeat delete repeat
oh shit I forgot the words! what is this tune this nameless
motive passacaglia bass line, recall this my tempestive brain

minor key funny/funky/bloody valentine, fully open orifice, go for the high G
show me some teeth. I can't brood on the smashedheartedness
of losing a lover; I've only had that happen once

still sobbing helpless over her, *everybody finds love*
in the end. where/who are the fates writing
the libretto of my life, what is the crux

go away I'm hungered. will my Hecuba call or will
I be burned again? Let me leave her a voicemail
before I eat a can of peaches, tell her I love her

Mignon

“just breathe and sing,” that’s what
you were taught
when you could hardly speak to his face
in a normal tone, even-keeled

look at you, memorizing operas and
aching to learn arias, joking
about that one song from *Wicked*
everyone sings,

torching a Sondheim, pouring yourself
into that mug you cried into that morning

and now look at your, just text
no piano cues to guide your path.
he would be proud.

don’t think about the intonation
don’t worry about the words
just breathe and sing

you’re a big girl now

don’t worry about your shoes
you look beautiful, kid.
just breathe and sing.

(you don’t have to care
what he thinks)
just breathe and sing.

Rosasharn

will there be angels singing for you / with you / in the dark between sunset and sunrise / I want to sing for them but what / not yet / maybe they will like soft achey longing lullabies / “No Surprises” or “If I Loved You”/ or loud joyful self-loving self-loathing / celebrations of humanity / like “Back to Black” or Mahler 2 / who can say / maybe they won’t have music / but with two percussionists / two sopranos / two pianists / one mezzo-soprano / and that’s just from their father’s side of the family / assuming nature versus nurture is in play / and nurture is more aggressive in their development / I’d like to believe that they will at least have a good ear / but who can say / I didn’t know that my grandmother also had absolute pitch until after she died / I promise to tell them everything we have in common / if anything / like attracts like / and infants are no different / I like them already / I want to be there when they’re born / because I’ve missed so many hospital goodbyes / I don’t want to miss a hello too / someone is humming “Buffalo Gals”/ oh darling child / spine gently curving as you dream

Carmen

I want desperately to be held, be loved.
But still I am alone, quelled. (Be loved.)

The best are the hours when I blast “Back to Black”
and strut confidently, call myself *Beloved*.

I slick on red lipstick- Mightiest Maraschino,
Clinique - and pout at the mirror handheld. “Be loved.”

The Moon adored the Sun so much that she
followed him forever, never quelled. Be loved.

I told a boy that I liked him once; he told me
he respected me too much. Never called. “Beloved.”

If Adam had truly loved Lilith, he’d have given her
the choice to love, not inferior, quelled; beloved.

The Sun is one star of many. He wouldn’t dare
tell the Moon, afraid she’ll be dispelled. *Beloved*.

If Romeo had waited two more minutes for the light,
Juliet would not have held her dead Beloved.

I’ve never gotten roses, but I’d want casablanca lilies,
moonlight blossom, day withheld. Be loved.

The Moon never hears me, or so she’d like me
to believe. Her words are withheld. Be loved.

At my brother’s wedding, I was teasingly told
“It’s your turn next!” “Never!” I wanted to yell. (Be loved.)

A rose is beautiful in all her colors, but her
knives are a deterrent to being hand-held. ~~Be loved~~.

Quiet now, the song is “You Know I’m No Good”
and I’ve never been drunker. Glass spilled. Beloved!

I never claimed to dress for a man; I don red and pink
lips for self-pleasure, for selfies titled “Be loved.”

A man who won’t pleasure a lover as he is pleased
is not worthy to love. Better with a handheld beloved.

“You’re so quiet, why are you so shy?” Because I don’t
want to dive and rise with heart shriveled. (Be loved.)

Eve was punished for knowing, for pleasuring
in the apple and not in her man; thus, expelled. ~~Beloved.~~

The best thing about sleeping alone is you can make
yourself a blanket burrito, a cave, a shell. Be loved.

Ice in my chest, heart turning blue. If you can touch it,
good luck keeping it from being melted; be loved.

If you want me, you can have me but, as she sings,
“He can only hold her for so long.” I’m cold, beloved.

Not now, but maybe someday a lover
will call me “Darling?” then exhale, “Be loved.”

ACT THREE: ADULTS ONLY

Kate Pinkerton happens to be married to The Worst Puccini Tenor

I know “there’s a special place in hell
for women who don’t support other women”
but it’s so hard when there are women

who don’t believe the stories other women tell them in courts of law
who ignore the terrible actions their superiors do and suggest
who claim to be bullied when their husbands are bullies
who don’t acknowledge the reasons why gun restrictions are desired
who don’t understand the gravity of sexual assault and why it can
 be so difficult for women to come forward about it
who ignore the problematic characteristics of men and other women
 because they are friendly with said problematic people
who don’t use the pronouns that women ask them to use
who take away the dreams and artwork of other women by lifting up
 their own lives as the ideal
who adopt the features and hairstyles of other cultures without
 understanding the context and implications of those features
who don’t apologize for being complicit in men’s destruction of other
 women’s lives
who don’t acknowledge that feminism can differ in other cultures
who stand by and watch other women immolate themselves
who don’t tell the stories of other women who helped them get
 where they are today
who hear of other women dying and do nothing to honor them

Lay me down

Wine is a depressant is a stimulant
what is wine and cheese then
taste the rosé I forgot to chill
it's fine I'm fine it's wine

Pour me a glass
and I'll spin you something fresh
drip the words from my mouth
sneer at the offer of maple syrup for tea
that's too sweet too much too early

too much feeling trapped
a spider in an overturned glass
too tight
indents in my ribcage

too sweet to me
blow me a kiss
and I'll spin you something fresh
never a goodbye again

Doodly Doo I'm TopsyTired Are You

What good is crying no I'm laughing I'm not alone I've drunk too much pink wine and not enough cheese but she loved the cheese so how could I take it away from her I'm tired why this

headache why this Fuchsia spreading to the reaches of my lips I want cake cupid's bow moustache my feet hurt I can't very well walk around barefoot in notmyhouse I can't find my lipstick I'm

too tired to reapply it so I'll leave it strip it off when I get home peel my breasts free from my bra goodbye pants goodbye socks goodbye Wonder Woman panties too hot now I feel like Bruno Mars isn't that fun on a Friday oh fuck it's Saturday in the song but you know what I mean

or do I even know what I mean that is the question not To Be or Not To Fucking Be shut up Shakespeare brain this is notthetime

Coordination

Your eyes are green-blue

Your eyes are laughing crowfeet

Your eyes are staring down a page

Your eyes are guiding your hands

Your hands are guiding your eyes

Your hands are too fast you go too fast

Your hands are tapping in place of feet

Your hands are witness to the song

Your hands are beholden to the cards

Your hands are warm catching

my hands catching my eyes catching your eyes

May 2017: grandfather's house, interior

The upright piano that sat by the front door, gone. The two looms in the weaving room, where I made pink and purple placemats and coasters one summer, gone. Her hand-knit sweaters are buried deep in the drawers, woolen, cold now. The space where she used to set up the Christmas tree is now permanently occupied by crates of baroque records in angled stacks. They never get played now, only the talk shows on public radio until his afternoon nap. Her bedroom is untouched, no indentation in the mattress, no drawers left open. Her silken bathrobe is still in the closet, light blue, almost silver. Some of his paintings are still on the walls. Adjust the arrangement every so often.

It was too quiet there. Only my father and my grandfather talking about everything but her. I tried to interject but there is so little I can confidently say. It snowed for a few hours, and a chill settled on my heart in being there. It was too quiet there. I found an *Oklahoma!* vocal score wedged in the bookshelf and wished I could hear her singing, but I only heard myself sighing. Every room in the house felt so empty, so contained, so wrong. I wished there was someone else there with us - not necessarily my grandmother, but someone. It was too quiet there.

Nicklausse

I want to write like a Radiohead song -
at times nonsensical, others lovesick -
but I can't get it, the words come out wrong.

I try to emulate Yorke, string myself along
and stretch out my sadness to something I can pick
at like a scab, the ache of a Radiohead song,

but my despair is more a triangle than a gong.
I scrape and pull at the instruments, easily flicked
away. I can't get it and the words come out wrong.

The panic is coming on strong, but would a bong
help? I don't know how and I hate the smell, so thick.
I'd rather drink and hear a Radiohead song,

ride with the ghost horses. I want to dream, long
hours in a glass house, but I fall. I jolt and kick,
now awake. Write it down. (The words come out wrong.)

I long to be free, be weird and emotionally strong,
strut with knives out. I'm a creep in pink lipstick.
I want to write like a Radiohead song
but I can't get it, the words come out wrong.

Salomé

Must I cut off your head. God believed Eve when she told him where she got the apple but she was still cursed with difficulty in childbirth. No one believed Cassandra when she saw Troy fall because a god cursed her for refusing to offer him her cervix. Medusa was cursed for being raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple. Why wasn't Poseidon cursed. Napoléon and Joséphine were both infidelitous but it was her affair that caused such a change in their marriage. "Power is my mistress." You're hurting me. But what did Napoléon expect when he left her in Paris two days after their wedding. What did Joséphine expect when her affair with Hippolyte was exposed. At least nineteen women have told their tales of 45 sexually assaulting them and he is still on the highest seat in the land. Why would I lie. Who crafted the idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, when she was clearly a beloved follower of Christ. Must I destroy your pleasure to make you see me.

I'm walking to hell and I'm not looking back

she was formed
from the clay not his rib

once remade as alien
the mother of humans the Lilin

a passing reference in the Talmud
named in the Dead Sea Scrolls

renaissance art Goethe made her
the devil's companion possible love

Joyce named her the Patron
of Abortions

she smelled the wet
dust of beginning

Are you him
are you my lover

and he didn't say *No*
because he didn't know how

and she was formed
from the clay not his rib

are there roses in her
garden are there apples

snake curled around her breasts
sometimes she is the snake
but not The Snake

she came to him
and was the first *No*

and she was formed
from the clay not his rib

It always comes back

You have so much hair like I don't know

what sits on my head every day.

Rinse and repeat, new hands fresh techniques
get in real close and feather up my bangs

my grays coming in, metallized stress
landing on my cheek, near my sleeve.

Sitting on a stool as my mother chopped
at my mane - I don't know
if she used a bowl but it came out that shape -
but after the thing was over I didn't care.

It was hard enough to be
still for piano lessons, why this?

Why did we do it in the TV room,
why not the bathroom
where there's already hair collecting?
I don't remember wet cuts with her -

I might be wrong, I was under ten
and there's a lot of fog over those years
in my hippocampus.

I don't really remember going to salons
except as her tagalong but I must have
I walk by now and feel a sense of nostalgia
for something moved on after that Domino's expanded
when did that happen

I don't know when she stopped cutting my hair herself
but

I remember choosing the pixie
when I was thirteen, A Big Fucking Deal. [SEP] Easy tight crop, keeps the thickness down.
Little to no variation
I like what I like:

Get in get out sit back
put in some peacock feathers.
You know how to use wax and grease right?
Yes I use a round brush.
This tea tree shampoo is good for your scalp.
I don't have time to straighten it every day.
It's going under a hat so just dry it.
No one's going to look at it.
You have so much hair.

In dreams I have hair down to my waist, covering
my breasts as I lie in the greenyellow grass, watching the moonrise.

I blame my father for my grays
(my mother dyes hers so I don't know)
I blame my sister for not being in the same
region anymore but that's wrong it's me
I don't know if she has any grays yet
or my brother but we all have good hair
but I almost like my grays, a mark

of time; I'm embracing this shock of color,
this natural reaction. I'm moving out
I'm going to Montana
I'm going to graduate school
I'm still singing for this wedding
I'm growing my hair out
it's getting weird and flippy again
I need a haircut to get me through this.

First grays before
first sex, that's startling.

This is mine, my damage, my point of pride. The last
things to grow in, I'm unsure about pulling
them out. Are they weedy? Who knows,
but they're a calling card of the ghosts beyond
the final passage.

There's hair
all over the floor now,
but it's not enough
to salvage, it can't be helped.

Second Egg

An egg needs only one turn to change.
Sperm to zygote; crack to scramble; tilt
to crash. Discordance to harmony; major tonality
to augmentation or diminishment. All simplicity as
a flick of my bony wrist to crack this egg
I'm making after lovemaking after breadmaking
after eggbreaking afternoon.

To Calvin, age one

Hello again, dearest boy
Dearest boy, we are blue
You, dearest boy, are love
I am so happy you are here
You are bright aquamarine, dearest boy
Dearest boy, you are our delight
You met him, dearest boy
He touched your forehead, dearest boy
Four generations with you in that house
Dearest boy, I am coming to you
You, dearest boy, are coming to me
I kiss you, dearest boy, on the cheek
I love your, dearest boy, laugh
Toddle forward, dearest boy
Dearest boy, cuddle your mother and father
You are such joy, dearest boy

Nine Translations from *Love Songs from the Man'yōshū*

One.

by Fujiwara Hirotsugu

This single sprig I sent you
by night message
carries more than 100 words
in its blossoms
but foremost:
don't neglect me, beloved.

Two.

by Lady Ōtomo Sakanoue

The most painful
is a love unacknowledged,
like a starlily bloom clouded
by the thick summer reeds.

Three.

by Ōtomo Yakamochi

In the flowering garden
the crimsons are luminousfragrant;
cascading blossoms and a new girl
beckon you toward the path.

Four.

by Anonymous

I writhe in ecstatic agony
but even if this love kills me
I will not will it to words
or paint it bright,
arranged with morning glory blossoms.

Five.

by Ōtomo Yakamochi

As I lift my eyes
to the crescent moon,
I remember
a bold glance from
a beauty with arched eyebrows.

Six.

by Ōtomo Yakamochi

The harvest wind blows
as I wait by the window,
all sashes undone:
will you come, will you come
now? It's moonset.

Seven.

from the Kakinomoto Hitomaro Collection

Since I was loosed
from my mother's side,
I've never felt
such loneliness, such coldness
outside her embrace.

Eight.

by the Daughter of Sono Ikuha

Everyone says
my hair is a mess,
it's too long and that I should
put it up. But I leave it
this way for you, dearest.

Nine.

by Yamabe Akahito

I wanted to show him
these plum blossoms
but they are muddled
in the snow, decayed and duplicated.

In the woods

A trout, fallen from the net into an old spring brook. Fallen like tears, trickling down the side of the urn. Free again to be caught again. Across the wild, darling, the old, the wild. Across, the silver wolf spies his brother catching the brook trout and sits tall. Fallen again. Eyes narrow, teeth on the verge of exposure. The wolves' reunion was postponed to now, waylaid by wind and ice. The spark of beginning. The fall, once more.

9.29.19

It's fucking September and I didn't ask
for chilled powder for my birthday but here we are.
Dear Amazon, why is this book in a nebulous
delivery phase? It wasn't even properly
published until last Tuesday, tottering forward
in her Instastory with delight so how
is it possible to be either out of prints or interminably delayed?
Why are my deliveries from ULTA
and Taka-An faster than you,
ocean crossing included?
Dear Barnes and Noble,
why is my order in Texas when
it was supposed to be on my doorstep
last Tuesday? I am not jazzed. Fucking hell.
Please don't slip on the frigid stoop.
Don't stick, please don't stick.
My left thumb is plum shellac, my right is raspberry.

Notorious

I never expected to become a Lipstick Queen

I used to be The Short Haired Girl
The Pizza Delivery Girl
The “Send in the Clowns” Girl
The Human Pitch Pipe
The She-Beast
The Best Music Theory Tutor
The De Facto Section Leader
The Real Alto
The Bassist

Funny how time changes
what we call ourselves
why we call ourselves
where we call ourselves

Juliette

My Yet Unknown Lover tattooed my name,
featherlight,
on their left ribcage;
 kissing it, I awoke and tasted pillowcase.

My brother hopes I'll try dating again, but all I have going
for me are plump rosy lips and soft humming
 when not full-throated singing
 or drunkenly belting Broadway's greatest hits
 wobbling and clutching the invisible piano

I don't want to die alone but I don't want to settle.
Am I
being prudish or fearless?

I want love like a floodlight, blind me with it. Embrace me.

The flowers were a surprise, completely not unwelcome.
Orange lilies and sunflowers, matching the sunset.
I nearly missed the card and thought My Yet Unknown Lover
was finally coming true. But no.

A song without text is unfiltered
 howling at the moon. A poem
without music is an empty teacup,
 starved for starlight.

Lonely as I am, I'm no Ophelia, mourning in madness
and gaslit by a sack-of-shit boyfriend.
I want to believe My Yet Unknown Lover wouldn't be that.

I choke back my mourning sounds
save them for a night in the field.

Dear God, I hope you hear me as I whisper these thoughts
to only you, but not as a prayer tonight. I'm unbaptized
 but believing in you gives me
some solace. Please let me continue this way.

The rabbit is my one constant love, softest but still there. He doesn't
thump like a real rabbit but he's not as lonesome as real either.
If someone else

joined me in bed, would I hide him away?

I'm drowning in turquoise sheets and comforters,
still haunted into wakefulness by oncoming headlights
I can't make it I can't make it stop stop stop help me.

Sucks to be a soprano sadly

Turandot you fought and set up your challenge so you wouldn't run into this exact problem with male tyranny just like your ancestor Lo-u-ling. You swore no man would possess you. Your kingdom peasants love watching glittering fuckboys crumble so why deny them that. What made you think he would be different from any other man even if he did get your riddles right. Why the fuck did his kiss change you. Didn't ask he just kissed just dry lips running your red across claiming he loved you from his first glance as you ordered his predecessor beheaded. Turandot why. He doesn't even have any money so what good is he to you. Elvira you too. What made you think he would stay true when he wouldn't remove his domino when he climbed your window. No eyes just dry lips as he pressed into you. That's not even him his voice just dropped a fach how could you not realize that when he had his lazy burning eyes on peasant skirts not an hour ago. Ignoring your silver silk and mantilla and pre-bel canto lines. Love is not love has blinders on love is not into that kinky shit so go find someone better for you. Why the fuck do you go back for him when you know he's not going to change even for the devil's emissary. Better to be alone. Liù killing yourself so a man can claim victory over another woman is not the greatest show of love especially for a Puccini tenor even if it does fuck over imperial traditions even though it's not the original empire. You could have let Turandot have her way and this would have been much better for you both because you'd both be away from that selfish Nessun Dorma prince. Fuckboys all over and Mozart men are not much better even outside that fach but especially the tenors. Pamina you are the only one with a tenor so good he won over your angry-ass mama from the first sight and your father too. Ciocio-san you deserve so much more than a lieutenant who presses into you dry and then leaves for thirty-six months. Dry leaves slipping down like your tears that he doesn't deserve. The prince was right there and offered you so much but you let a white man written by a white man get in your heart and break you when he finally came back only to go again. So upset that you felt death was your only out. That writing white man and so many other writing white men might have had an orientalist fetish that is not super okay but goddamn he wrote some beautiful lines fuck what a conflict. Mimi poets are the worst about love and get super jealous and can't always keep bread on the table. Get you someone who loves you like they love their coat. Or let Musetta take you away to be happy and not poor together. And judgy-ass mezzopoet ES how dare you sit in your cushy theatre recliner and not help these women by rewriting their narratives and getting them home safe.

Letter to Maria Callas

M. Callas,

I am writing to you to express my loathing for your coopting of *Carmen* in 1964. I am surely neither the first nor the last mezzo-soprano whose ire you ignited with that recording. She is ours, our most notable leading role in the canon, so stay in your lane. Being drawn to the drama the *duende* of Carmen does not give you the right to sing it. I want to loathe you but I can't because your Carmen was my first Carmen and my first opera gateway so I owe you some veneration. Part of me wants to claim you as one of our own because of your darkness but you sang too much soprano repertoire to really be one of us but your molasses low range was your joy is enviable.

I dreamed I was a chorus priestess in *Norma* and my girl MD was singing "Casta diva" but your voice poured from her throat and then I drowned in tears pooled at my stagedirty feet. I wrote to MD because I thought it was a sign that someday she would sing that role, maybe on par with you. Bless her please, let the moon you called for shine on her.

I've pondered tapeworms, but I know you lost so much when you did that and I'm already petrified of the day I get my oldladywarble. Lord bless old church ladies but I don't want that. I'll stay round stay warm, sing sing sing.

42 years gone yet still so here, such a large shadow. Do people pass your grave and ask your blessing as a prelude to *in bocca al lupo*? Do letters like this and lilies trail your estate? JN recently passed, did you welcome her to your side? Would you want to be seen as a hologram or would you rather that those who've seen your tears be the last to see you living as you staggered into the flames, setting a trail for Khaleesi and following Dido?

Ciao,
E. Spencer

P.S. Your *Carmen*, precious as it is to me, is not my favorite in hindsight. Your diction in the Card Trio is not great nor helpful to me as a listening resource. I'd rather go with TT, LP, or JN for major recordings of that opera. LP, also a soprano but a much fuller and controlled sound in the Card Trio. JN with that diamond cut diction. TT with that proper mezzo warmth. Damn you for gathering such a great cast - RM is one of my favorite Escamillos. I wake to his "Votre toast!" on the daily. NG and AG are also glorious together and your final duet with NG shakes my heart.

Overwhelmingly sad

I never got to say goodbye.

My roommate's dog also died that weekend.
We held a funeral in the backyard,
buried her in a hole
by the roots of an oak tree.

I wanted to but didn't
somehow couldn't
cry.
Eyes welled but unable to release
It's okay to cry
I whispered to my tear ducts
hoping for something to happen, anything.
Eyes wide open, gawking at
October sunlight and hoping for
a lacrimal reaction.
Nothing. Why.

I wanted to cry for losing my grandmother
but even more for my mother.
I wanted to cry and hold her
I wanted her to cry and hold me
I wanted to not have held it together for weeks and months and the rest of the year
but two thousand miles and seven state lines separated us
I lied and
said *I'm fine, I'll be okay.*

I visited a nursing home
on a field trip for class.
Thoughts of my grandmother
in a place like that
with people who could only care so much
cracked the dam
and I cried for ten minutes during next hour's voice lesson
only ten minutes then choking down again.

How do you say that last goodbye
to the woman who birthed you,
raised you, gave you away at your wedding?
How do you do that?
How can you do that?

A July maelstrom on the memorial day for her,

amplified humidity in the lonely Michigander summer.
I buried my face in the futon as I sobbed, fully
ugly crying, no holding back.
I imagined my mother and I as mirror images
with tear-stained cheeks and puffed eyes
bitter smiles.

Now
I cry whenever I say
goodbye to my mother
even when I'll be back soon.
Tears pooling into my hands
and spilling onto the airport floor
 on the bus seat
 on the sidewalk
 on my bedsheets
 on the bathroom sink
 on the lips of my tea cups
freely.

From March — 79

Tired of those who bring words, words but no language
I went to the snowy island.
The wild, unspoken words.
Unwritten pages surround on all sides!
I passed deer tracks in the snow.
Wordless speech.

Pink Wink



if I want to be a little more bold
I go a little more bright
if I want to be a little more flirty
aim for a pink
if I want to be simple, just to have
something on the lips
head for a sheer or a gloss, light color
if I want a bold simplicity
go for a nude
if I feel like I need to not murder a person
red or hottest pink

Dido

Don't forget me, don't let me burn to ashen obscurity, eat my heart to keep it beside yours. Otherwise I'll tell the gods and the angels and the devils that you lied.

Luceant in somno

1. Don't not invite everyone to a party
2. A hundred years is a hundred years is a hundred gardening seasons
3. Keep your dishes clean and plentiful
4. Don't not invite everyone to a party
5. I'll sing you a lullaby
6. Good child, fairest of all
7. Don't leave your child alone on her birthday
8. Don't not invite everyone to a party
9. All fires create ash, all ash creates new life
10. Don't wake from your dream
11. Your lip color name doesn't have to be your name
12. Don't follow the lights
13. Being unable to say no does not mean consent
14. Every rose has its thorns but yours are enormous
15. Don't not invite everyone to a party
16. Don't leave your fate to others
17. Let a sleeping girl lie
18. Your fate is your fate can be changed

The oldest wasn't invited because she was old and hadn't heard the call, while the youngest was because she was seen with her sisters on the regular. The oldest ground her teeth to points, intending to eat what she was due, gold plate and sore gums be damned. The youngest picked at her roast pheasant, wishing the bird were beside her instead of the crumbling oldest.

"How dare they, how fucking dare they," grumbled the oldest.

The youngest swallowed her retort, wanting to placate the hateful oldest but not wanting to cause a scene. She looked instead at the baby, laughing for the first time and sparkling with joy.

"How fucking dare they," as the oldest rose to offer a blessing.

Swan

This is dancing is trembling with something beyond her
Something is holding her something inside her beyond him
something is dancing inside her skull something collapses inside
him his heart is not his nor hers then whose hands are holding it
want to crush it in her hands if not hers then whose heels are digging
into his insteps whose trembling is shaking the house shaking it
apart she is trembling for him for her the real one not the hooded hole-riddled
substitute he held as they danced and she reached her frigid hand for his
and he didn't deny her as she collapsed and the house shook apart
and her lights went out and she released his heart to puncture her own

Exit, ready for curtain call

Adelaide
Amneris
Angelina (Cinderella)
Ariadne
Ariodante
Arsace
Art Banker
Auntie
Azucena
Baba the Turk
Bradamante
Brangäne
Carmen
Charlotte
Cherubino
Cornelia
Dalila
Dido
Didon
Didone
Ebol
~~Erda~~
Fides
First Norn
Florence
Fricka
Fyodor
Giovanna Seymour
~~Granma~~
Griselda
Herodias
Hänsel
Isabella
Isolier
Jezibaba
Jo March
Jordan Baker
Judith

Julius Caesar
Kate
Kate Pinkerton
Katisha
~~Klytämnestra~~
La Cieca
La Principessa
Laura
Lel
Little Buttercup
Lucretia
Ma Joad
Ma Moss
Madame Flora
Maddalena
Mae
Magdelone
Malcolm
Mama Lucia
Margret
Marguerite
Maria
Marina
Marthe
Mary
Meg March
Mignon
Miranda
Mistress Quickly
Mother Gertrude
Mother Goose
Myrtle Wilson
Nicklausse
Octavian
Olga
Orfeo
Orlofsky
~~Orsini~~

~~Ortrud~~
Pauline
Princess de Bouillon
Ratmir
Romeo
Rosina
Rosmira/Eurimene
Ruggiero
Ruth
~~Schwertliete~~
Second Lady
Second Norn
Serse
Sesto
Siebel
Smeaton
Sosostris
Stella
Stephano
Suzuki
Tancredi
Tango Singer
The Baroness
The Composer
~~The Countess~~
~~The Gingerbread Witch~~
The Innkeeper
The Marquise of
Burkenfield
The Mother
~~The Mother~~
The Pilgrim
The Sorceress
The Widow Begbick
Third Lady
Third Wood Sprite
Ulrica
Ursule
~~Waltraute~~

END NOTES

Fire cannot kill a Valkyrie

- Brünnhilde is a Valkyrie, daughter and champion of Wotan, in German composer Richard Wagner's (1813-1883) opera tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*, also known as The Ring Cycle). In the second part, *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyrie*), she defies her father's orders and saves a young woman named Sieglinde from death (Sieglinde was to be punished by the gods for falling in love with her long-lost brother Siegmund and carrying his child). As a result, Wotan curses Brünnhilde to sleep on a fiery mountain until a man who is pure of heart can rescue her (this man will be Siegfried, child of Siegmund and Sieglinde).

Rage Against the Mozart

- "Mass for the Slightly Inconvenienced" was a little joke from Paul McShee, guest conductor and search candidate for the Missoula Symphony Orchestra. He used it when he wanted the chorus to put more energy and emotion into our rehearsal for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's (1756-1791) Requiem in D minor.
- Fauré is French composer Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924). He also wrote a Requiem in D minor.
- Rutter is English composer John Rutter (b. 1945), known mostly for his choral works. He composed a Requiem in 1985.
- JN is American dramatic soprano Jessye Norman (1945-2019).
- Verdi is Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), who also composed a very famous Requiem.
- JS Bach is German composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).
- *Ein Deutsches Requiem* is a German-language Requiem composed by German composer Johannes Brahms (1833-1897).
- WAM is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, a prodigious Austrian composer.
- Süssmayr is Austrian composer Franz Xaver Süssmayr (1766-1803), most famous for completing Mozart's Requiem after his death.
- Bernstein is American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990).
- NNR is Nina Nash-Robertson (1947-2018), former director of choral activities at Central Michigan University.
- DT is Dr. Eric Hoy Tucker, professor of voice and current director of the School of Music at Central Michigan University.
- A tritone is a dissonant interval between two pitches, six half-steps wide. An example is in the chorus of Bernstein's song "Maria" in his musical *West Side Story*: the first two syllables of the name Maria are one tritone apart, resolving upward to a consonant chord. Tritones can be very powerful with all the tension they can hold, and they almost always get resolved (that is, the tension is decreased and the next pitch or chord may be more pleasing to the ear).

Musetta

- "Climbing over rocky mountain" is a women's chorus number from the W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*.

- “Three little maids from school are we” is a women’s chorus number from the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *The Mikado*.

Baba the Turk

- Baba is a bearded woman featured in Russian composer Igor Stravinsky’s (1882-1971) opera *The Rake’s Progress*.
- Velma Dinkley is one of the two girls in the Mystery Inc. quartet from the *Scooby-Doo* franchise.

Don’t take me back to Mount Pleasant

- This poem references Mount Pleasant, Michigan, home of my undergraduate institution, Central Michigan University.
- Staples Hall, also known as Staples Family Concert Hall, is a performance venue in the School of Music at Central Michigan University.
- My father came up with the nickname “Flat Irritating,” the joke being that Mount Pleasant is not mountainous (or pleasant, depending on personal opinion).

The Composer

- This poem was written as an ekphrastic response to Ludwig Van Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 8, Opus 13 “Pathetique.”

This isn’t easy so don’t make it hard on me

- These micro-poems were formally inspired by C. D. Wright’s collection *40 Watts*.

The Gingerbread Witch

- Velma Kelly is one of the leading characters in the John Kander and Fred Ebb musical *Chicago*, played by Catherine Zeta-Jones in the 2002 film adaptation.

Tap twice to turn off

- This poem was inspired by the work of Killarney Clary.

If you can hear this then you know who I am

- This poem was originally inspired by [college roommate gone; his hamper full. I’ll do us both a favor] by D.A. Powell and borrowing vocabulary scattered throughout his collection *Cocktails*.
- “Green finch and linnnet-bird” is the title of a song from Stephen Sondheim’s (b. 1930) musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.
- “everybody finds love/in the end” is from Japanese pop singer Utada Hikaru’s song “Sakura Nagashi.”
- Hecuba was the queen of ancient Troy prior to its fall, wife to Priam, and mother to such notable figures as Paris, Hector, and Cassandra.

Mignon

- Since it burst onto Broadway in 2003, the Stephen Schwartz (b. 1948) musical *Wicked* has produced popular selections for young women in musical theatre to sing. The

reference here is probably “Defying Gravity” or “Popular,” songs sung by the characters Elphaba and Glinda respectively.

Rosasharn

- This poem was inspired by the work of Elisabeth Whitehead.
- Rosasharn is a character from American composer Ricky Ian Gordon’s (b. 1956) opera *The Grapes of Wrath*, adapted from the John Steinbeck novel of the same name.
- “No Surprises” is a song on English rock band Radiohead’s 1997 album *OK Computer*.
- “If I loved you” is a song from Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein’s musical *Carousel*.
- “Back to Black” is a song on Amy Winehouse’s (1983-2011) 2006 album *Back to Black*.

Carmen

- “Back to Black,” “You Know I’m No Good,” and “He Can Only Hold Her” are all songs on Winehouse’s album *Back to Black*.

Kate Pinkerton happens to be married to The Worst Puccini Tenor

- Unfortunately, a lot of male characters in the late 19th century of opera were pretty terrible to women for various reasons, and often they are tenors (higher male voice). One of the worst, though, is Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton in Italian composer Giacomo Puccini’s (1858-1924) opera *Madama Butterfly*. A soldier in the American Navy, he goes to Japan and marries an underage girl named Ciocio-san for convenience, inspiring her to abandon her traditional values and become a Christian woman. He doesn’t tell her that it’s only a temporary thing, then unknowingly impregnates her and returns to America. Pinkerton doesn’t contact her for three years, but when he does finally return to Japan with his new American wife, Kate, he learns that he has a son. He doesn’t face Ciocio-san when he and Kate take away the child and Pinkerton only comes in after she has committed suicide. He’s awful.
- The quote in the first two lines is paraphrased from former United States Secretary of State Madeline Albright. I first heard it invoked by pop singer Taylor Swift after she felt she was unjustly jabbed at by comedienne Tina Fey and Amy Poehler about her love life at an awards show.

Nicklausse

- Yorke is Thom Yorke (b. 1968), lead vocalist of Radiohead.
- “The panic is coming on strong” is a line from the song “Glass Eyes” on Radiohead’s 2016 album *A Moon Shaped Pool*.
- “ride with the ghost horses” is a reference to a line from “You and Whose Army?” on Radiohead’s 2001 album *Amnesiac*. “hours in a glass house” is a reference to “Life in a Glass House,” and “strut with knives out” references “Knives Out,” both also on *Amnesiac*.
- “I’m a creep” is a line from the song “Creep” on Radiohead’s 1993 album *Pablo Honey*.

DoodlyDoo I’m TopsyTired Are You

- This poem was inspired by works written by Ellen Bryant Voigt.

- The second and third lines of the third stanza contain references to the 2014 Bruno Mars and Mark Ronson song “Uptown Funk.”

Sucks to be a soprano sadly

- Turandot is the title character in Puccini’s opera *Turandot*. She is a Chinese princess who sets a challenge of three riddles to any man who seeks her hand, beheading the ones who answer incorrectly.
- Elvira is a character in Mozart’s opera *Don Giovanni*, one of the title character’s jilted lovers.
- Liù is another character in *Turandot*, a young woman who dies for refusing to name the prince who solved Turandot’s riddles.
- Pamina is a character in Mozart’s opera *Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute)*, the main love interest and daughter of the Queen of the Night.
- Cio-cio-san is the title character in Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly*; “chocho” is the word for butterfly in Japanese, and then it was adjusted for Italian spelling (“ci” is pronounced CHEE).
- Mimi is one of two major women in Puccini’s opera *La bohème*. She falls in love with the leading tenor character, a poet named Rodolfo. When Mimi falls ill with tuberculosis, her friend Musetta sells jewelry to get medicine. Their friend Colline also sells his coat (but not before singing an aria about how much he loves his coat and how sad he is to see it go).

In the woods

- This poem was an aural translation of a poem by Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer (1931-2015), “From March — 79.” My colleagues and I did not speak Swedish, so we tried to transcribe what English words we thought we heard and make poems out of those transcriptions.

Notorious

- “Send in the Clowns” is a song from Sondheim’s musical *A Little Night Music*.

9.29.19

- Taka-An is short for the Takarazuka Annex, a Japanese store that carries new and secondhand media related to the Takarazuka Revue, an all-women musical theatre company based out of Takarazuka City in the Hyōgo prefecture of Japan.

A Letter to Maria Callas

- MD is Mitra Darakhshandeh, a soprano colleague from my voice studio at Central Michigan University.
- Rumor has it that Maria Callas’s (1923-1977) dramatic weight loss was aided by the consumption of tapeworms.
- *In bocca al lupo* is an Italian phrase heard before stage performances, similar to “break a leg” in English. It literally means “into the wolf’s mouth” and the standard response is *crepi il lupo!* or “may the wolf die!”

- At the end of Italian composer Vincenzo Bellini's (1801-1835) opera *Norma*, she and her lover Pollione throw themselves on a pyre. Norma was one of Callas's most notable roles.
- TT is German-Greco-American mezzo-soprano Tatiana Troyanos (1938-1993).
- LP is American soprano Leontyne Price (b. 1927).
- RM is French baritone Robert Massard (b. 1925).
- NG is Swedish tenor Nicolai Gedda (1925-2017).
- AG is French soprano Andréa Guiot (b. 1928).
- Khaleesi is the Dothraki title given to the character Daenerys Targaryen in George R. R. Martin's saga *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Luceant in somno

- The Latin title translates as “shine in sleep,” which I applied to this retelling of the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty. This retelling was inspired by Anna Maria Hong's collection *H&G*.

Swan

- This poem was inspired by the 2010 film *Black Swan*.

Exit, ready for curtain call

- All of the names listed here are mezzo-soprano characters in what is considered the classical opera canon. My voice type is mezzo-soprano, so I am always watchful for these voices to appear. Names that are bolded are major characters. Crossed-out names are characters who die by the end of their respective operas.

