

Learning to Read

By Natascha Graham

*Poetry Editor Hezekiah writes: To think that I had yet to look, a poem lovely as a book:
Ms. Graham describes a forever lover as a most cherished book you never grow tired of reading.
Go ahead, ignored it and insist on remaining uninspired...I read a book once, red it was...HS
(Spacing is poet's own.)*

Learning to Read

There's something about You that evades definition
Words
Sentences
Which,
Put down on a page
Form the space around You.
Never the truest feeling
That blooms inside my head, my heart, my body
It is too pure
Too big
Too sweet
Too much
For paper,
Or books,
Or libraries,
To hold
But if, (by chance)
A book were to come close,
To holding
All
Of
The
Stories
Of You.
I would read
Every.
Single.
One.

Not once,
Or a thousand.
I would not stop
Not even when I had learned each page by heart,
Each heading
And sub-heading.
The words crossed out
And the lines in between
Like the space between stars
Words, sewn to my skin
Threaded through my veins
And with every beat of my heart
I would fall in love with You
Page by page
Over and over
Over every sudden full stop
Over every hesitant ellipses,
Through the curve of every question mark, and every exultant exclamation
Through every new page added
And every page torn out in rage
Every page blotted with tears.

I will keep reading (and re-reading)
Learning,
And loving You
Wherever Our story may take Us.

THE POET SPEAKS:

What inspired your poem?

My wife, Lori. So often I catch a glimpse of her doing the mundane, or, not doing anything at all - just sitting with the sun behind her, and I am overcome with a feeling that seems absolutely impossible to put into words. Learning to Read was my attempt to do just that. (You can read our love story in an article I wrote for The Gay and Lesbian Review [here](#).) Often my poetry, along with my prose writing, is inspired by how a single person reacts, exists or feels, in a single moment in time.

Your stylistic influences?

My stylistic influences were set aside for this poem. My poetry is normally very different. So for this poem, I emulated the way Lori writes. She excels in capturing a feeling or emotion perfectly in very few perfectly chosen words, whereas I am a glutton for detail. I exhaust descriptive

language and delight in its richness, something which is influenced greatly by Virginia Woolf's poetic prose, letters, and essays.

Why poetry is important to you to read:

For me, the sudden, raw relatability and intimacy found in poems by my favorite poets (Vita Sackville-West and Sylvia Plath, to name but two) is what is most important to me. Reading other people's poetry forces me to consider my own poetry in an entirely different light. Often it inspires me to challenge myself to incorporate or try something different, which, on occasion, has become something which has become part of my own personal style, as a writer.

And to write: I started writing poetry by accident as a teenager, as a means to recover from a particularly stubborn bout of writers' block. Words just fell out of me and appeared as a poem on the page. Since then I have used poetry as a means to quickly exercise my brain, and clap the butterfly net over the moment, feeling or thought, in between writing fiction. The lack of rules and immediacy appeals to me. There is (for me) often no planning at all. A thought, a moment, a person plays out in my mind and appears on paper. Unlike prose, there is no long haul. With prose, I take the time to explore around whatever it is I am trying to say, a languid visit to imagination. With poetry, it is a satisfying bullseye.

POET'S BIO: Raised simultaneously by David Bowie and Virginia Woolf, Natascha Graham is a fiction writer, artist and screenwriter who lives with her wife in a house full of sunshine on the east coast of England.

Her work has been previously published in Acumen, Litro and Flash Fiction Magazine.