

## ***Purple Flowers Always Bloom***

*Lilabeth Martchenke*

**H**ow do I tell you that you are in every flower I see? Life is lived in relation. You, on your knees, covered in dirt, a huge grin on your face as you gingerly uproot yet another bunch of monkey grass, transplanting it for the fourth time this season. You are making room for another flower garden. You, intent to plant me purple flowers. I don't even know what specific flowers they are, you planted three different kinds, all budding at different times of the year so no matter when I visit, that corner of the yard will always be my favorite color. I could have asked you, or looked it up on my own, just to know what kind they were, but I like it better not knowing. Not knowing means that every purple flower I see could be the one you planted for me. I imagine I can see you standing over a flight of purple flowers with your hand on your hip as you deliberate on which ones to choose, stroking your chin, an affectation you picked up when I was young because of the way it made me giggle. Every purple petal has your thumb print on it.

So too, does the monkey grass, the elephant ears of which you are so fond of, and even Mom's vegetable garden. I would follow you down the length of the house, always right on your heels, as you went to and from the gate. Tip toeing through the grass, knowing I should be wearing shoes but refusing in my childlike desire to appear tough. You would suddenly turn around, causing me to start and squeak and

oftentimes run into you. You would laugh and catch me from falling and your eyes would twinkle, so glad to see me still there, still following, still with you. I still do follow you around the yard on the days you're strong enough to walk it and you will still suddenly turn around, the mobile half of your face turning up in a soft smile, your eyes still twinkling at the fact that I am there, still behind you, still with you.

The yard was your happy place and I thought it so silly the way you would smile and grunt like Tim Allen did in the Home Improvement reruns that were always playing on our TV, gleefully spreading around manure every year so the Saint Augustine would grow strong enough to survive the Texas heat. Every blade of grass that blows in the wind seems to hold a measure of your care. I don't remember what kind of grass we had before, but I remember the spring you came home, as happy as a lark, with a bedfull of Saint Augustine squares in the truck. I didn't really understand then, why we were returving the backyard. Just wait, you said, wait and see this summer. It was a game changer. The stickers were gone, and we could now run barefoot through the grass without fear. That was the first summer we bought a slip 'n' slide. It was a neighborhood hit.

I will see some shrubbery outside of a business and find myself wondering what kind of sculpture you would be trying to make out of the bushes in the front yard if you had the stamina to hold the trimmer long enough to get the job done. You tried an elephant once, I remember. I think Ethan broke off its trunk during a birthday party and you scrapped the whole elephant thing, hippos were all the rage now, you said. Later years you found this green reflective orb that you stuck in there, wedged between the branches. You were inordinately fond of it. I caught you polishing it once or twice. I could tell you were distraught when a storm had shattered it. You reverently picked up the pieces, but never filled in the hole it left.

I've watched you build playsets and pits, the vegetable garden for Mom and her jalapenos and her watermelons and shockingly fruitful tomato plants, small brick dividers to house your flower beds under the bedroom windows. You rebuilt the fence along Perkins first, then along the old House of Fish lot behind us, hell, you rebuilt both decks twice since I have been alive and aware enough to remember. Your second ones are real works of art, truly. I think it was a good choice to just waterproof the wood instead of stain it darker. And the tin roof you built is gorgeous. I still think you should have some hanging lights or something. I know I know, electricity is a

bitch, but I know you will figure it out. Could have figured it out. You have other things on your mind right now.

I wish I was there, so I could run the electric cables for the lights, so I could take care of the flowers and the Saint Augustine for you, but the truth is my thumbs are blacker than night, despite the apparent lack of decay under my nails. I don't like getting dirty and the smell of manure always made me gag. I don't know what parts of the yard get what levels of sun at what parts of the day. I always hated the fact you watered the lawn every afternoon in August, so I wouldn't want to do that either. You gave me that aloe vera shoot and I have been too afraid to tell you it died. I don't know what happened. I don't want you to think it's because I wasn't trying; that I didn't care. It's just that I didn't know what to do. I wanted to see your face when you came over and saw it flourishing. I wanted to be able to smile back and engage with you on how I got it to be such a magnificent plant.

I hope that it's okay. That the aloe vera plant died. I hope that it's enough to know that I tried, that I wanted things to be different. That it's not because I didn't care enough. It is not yet Spring. I don't know how you will handle it this year. I don't know how the Saint Augustine will do without its yearly manure bath. How the monkey grass will do without being transplanted a dozen times. Or whether the topiary will get out of control without your creative gaze. At least the flowers you planted in the corner, the purple ones, at least those are perennials. Maybe that is why you picked them, so that even after you cease to take care of them, they will still flower year after year after year, just so no matter when I visit there will always be purple flowers in bloom.