

## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/4

Laura Ross

### We Are Chimera

*"...women carry at least three unique cell populations in their bodies — their own, their mother's, and their child's — creating what biologists term a microchimera..." — Katharine Rowland*

Did you know we exchange cells?

Mother&infant.

A fistful of your stardust settling  
at the dark trunks of my organs,  
swirling up the channel of my spine.  
My sweet mitochondrial, a mother's own  
DNA; you'll share yours, too—  
a pinch of Eve and the apple,  
Adam's atoms clinging like a fig leaf.

Let go, daughter? Give up on you?  
Tell that to the sticky web of my veins,  
to the wishbone at my core you snapped  
like a river current. Floating away  
is what the clouds do, manifesting  
into the sky. Girl in a flowered room,  
I pondered you into being. Lit the candles.  
Waited. Offered my marrow for your breath.  
What else do we share beside a heart-  
beat connected by a living cord?  
Once it was cut, I was milk. Until I wasn't.

Years later, I have to ask: where do you go?  
Even that sliver of moon  
beneath which you disappear  
is whole, an alchemy of shared light.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/4

Tender and threaded in is how I remember you—  
my ankles, his earlobes, and a new rhythm  
awakening to the walls of our rooms.  
Gumming on lullabies, you grew hungry.  
Even now, I can still hear you wailing.

**Rose-Colored Adobe**

*Colorado Springs, Colorado*

Let's start with the green,  
living valley, contoured  
in silt, sandstone, echoes  
of outflow. Go deeper—  
you'll find the bones  
and fossils. Dinosaur footprints.  
Whole geographies gone ancient  
beneath eons of mountains  
where oceans once churned.

You and I, on the patio  
of the rose-colored adobe  
are doing our own unlayering  
one glass of wine at a time.  
Sunlight, going pink-gold to terracotta  
across the clay walls of our rental.  
The only elements we've essentialized—  
coffee and a memory foam mattress.

Yesterday, we took the cog train  
to the top of Pike's Peak.  
Oxygen diluted in our lungs,  
we could almost gasp at what we saw.  
Dominion, billion-year-old granite  
slopes snagging cold clouds, tufts  
of tundra grass. We couldn't stay.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/4

Specks in borrowed hiking boots,  
we were swallowed by topography,  
the flightline of eagles just off the top  
of our heads. We took the life  
zones back down to earth:  
alpine, sub-alpine, montane, foothills.  
The marmots in transit on the naked bluffs  
scowling at our descension.

**Souvenirs from the Dead**

I collect them —  
feather, penny, dragonfly.  
As if souls could mouth a hello,

let it manifest — blinking roadside  
while we traffic past. Do I  
rattle? In my pocket, a skeleton

key, Venetian glass bead, moon  
shell spilling sand like ashes.  
Orb in a photo. White Shoulders,

the perfume, of course. Pattern  
on porcelain in Blue Willow.  
When one twin died after the other,

I saw two owls in a laurel tree  
Who was the starfish from?  
My father still sends me thistle—

soft clusters of stars floating  
on a current I can't catch.  
Hawks, doves, and sparrows

herald passages, and greetings  
are left at random in sidewalk chalk.  
A single long hair on the windowsill

after the funeral of a friend. Hers —  
when held up to the light,  
it shivered like a chime.

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I mark the seasons— ticket stub,  
cameo in carved ivory, chew toy  
where the dog used to sleep.

Bring your psalms & arrowheads,  
the small heart bled in ink  
from your favorite fountain pen,

your portends of pebble and angel,  
the page in the book with your  
name penciled in the margin.

**Where Are the Cows?**

Men in trucks have come to bury  
pipes beneath a rural expanse  
scraped void of green.  
Houses will rise, echo in duplicate  
along streets named in memory of trees.

Late again, applying mascara  
in the rearview mirror,  
I'd envied the cows and clouds  
and anything that lacked an agenda.  
Calves galumphing into a romp  
on legs sticky with amnion and Bahia.  
Their mothers, wall-eyed, a nurturance  
singular in weatherproof suede,  
white birds perched on their backs.  
*Where are the cows?*

Someone asks on our community chatline.  
I don't want to read the smart-ass replies.

Hadn't we made offerings—  
fistfuls of clover, apples, and rye grass thick  
and seeding on the other side of the fence.  
The cows, curious, ducked from our touch,  
then startled into a run opposite  
of whatever compass point we claimed.  
And wasn't that all of them?  
The cows, I mean, hurrying toward the light.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 18/4

Now, I dream of cows.

Great lumbering ghosts sprawled in a field  
so solemn we can feel a rhythm beneath us.

They sigh, flick their tails, flinch at bites  
of midges and horn flies that aren't there.

Sometimes, one will lay its great head so close  
I can see an eye glittering with concrete dust,  
or a tongue, grass-stained, glazed in acetone.