

Beyond All Telling: A Mini Drama

by [Evelyn Hooven](#) (October 2020)



The Wedding of the Bohemian, Edvard Munch, 1925

A pity beyond all telling Is hid in the heart of love.—W.B. Yeats

Keith's Father

Keith

Emilia

Keith's Father

Sometimes, when you were starting to get abstract, cubistic, symbolic or just too far out for us, your mother would say—I'm sure you remember—*Tell us the painting, Tell it to us first*. Then, I admit, we still hoped we could help you get it all out of your system and move towards work with a reliable income, no stains or charcoal. We paid strict attention . . . This time, tell it to *me*.

Keith

Emilia had a plane ticket to London, got sick, had to cancel. I didn't know that part soon enough. There was a crash, no survivors. Even after the relief, that shock stayed with me. I tried, with painting, to let go of it. There are broken columns, some distorted shards and in their midst a wedding veil torn into filaments. It's still untitled.

Keith's Father

Why not call it Crash or Collision?

Keith

Not its name . . . Sorry, this is belated. It's a birthday gift for you.

Keith's Father

It's immense. It needs my whole wall. Don't unwrap it . . .

I thought, once I retire I'll have a gentleman's study, a version of conservatory. Colliding fragments, shards, torn filaments? This can't be held back any longer. I never thought art was the proper work for a man to do. I don't see in you my . . . continuity.

(As he leaves, brief blackout. Pause)

Keith

With a sense of final sadness and finding the stairs steeper, more numerous, I loaded my weighty painting into the van and drove a little. Then something in me went blank as though protection from a pain I couldn't live through. It took time at some roadside to recover enough to drive. But I couldn't quite rally, couldn't even be fully angry. He was right, I can't provide what he'd find reliable continuity.

Does it make it worse that I have such strong attachments away from him?

(Brief passage of time)

Emilia

My mother had told me just to finish my year's end project. Everything would be taken care of. And there'd be photos and choices for my wedding gown.

You were working when the thick packet arrived, stamped FRAGILE and certified. *This is where you sign.*

Six photographs of wedding gowns. Each one different. And *she* is wearing every one.

How long have I tried not to know she was like that? I remember getting off the train, Thanksgiving vacation, an encumbered freshman with volumes and laundry. She looked away, then turned back, determined to smile. She wasn't glad to see me. I was not what she was waiting for. The years I spent idealizing her, trying to earn her unstrained concern . . . as though it were possible.

I hoped that with the wedding we'd at last bond. But she had to assemble apparel of her choice and get there first. She always *was* the way I had refused to see her. It must have been easier just to continue feeling unworthy.

Elegant, poised, and graceful, her sovereign message is *NOT YOU, ME.*

Who is Queen of the mountain? Who is fairest in the land? Who need not be mother-of-the-bride but, herself, a bridal variant?

One would think, making the photos postal-ready, weighed and marked FRAGILE, she'd see the light and stop.

Keith

I tried not to know that for them paint, charcoal or grit were worse than unkempt, were something like permanent damage. I thought, after my gallery and maybe a following, once we were married and I was on a faculty somewhere . . . but no, that's even worse, having to give up all hope of my reform. There should be at least one offspring-in-training. Always travel with a spare.

(Brief passage of time)

Emilia

There'll be no gown. A long skirt and blouse. Maybe silk with a slight flow.

Keith

Let's have the wedding we can make for ourselves.

Emilia

I'll need to let them know . . . quickly.

(Brief passage of time)

Emilia

Do you think we could use the studio cottage behind your gallery? The piano there could be enough for our music.

Keith

Maybe our new Divinity School friend will want to . . . officiate. A simple ceremony.

Emilia

Our guest list will be small, but shouldn't it include someone from your father's firm . . . or *some* firm? Better than his coming alone.

My mother . . . in whatever apparel she chooses . . . has a fine escort.

Keith

She takes our news fairly well.

Emilia

Her little game is over.

Keith

Why is it so painful . . . already in our twenties . . . to have probably outgrown our parents? We have each other and work.

Emilia

Is it knowing the strange loss of what we never had and tried
to replace with self-blame?

Keith

We'll still try to be good hosts . . . We'll rise to the
occasion, we'll preside. We won't let anyone intervene . . .
ever so helpful . . . with: *Do you know what the divorce rate
is? And higher among artists . . .*

Emilia

We'll escape all the well-intentioned harm masquerading as
concern.

Keith

I've been meaning to say . . . Yeats has a poem, *Beyond All
Telling*. That's what I'll call my painting.

(Brief passage of time)

Emilia

I think the traditional vows need no changes.

Keith

We could add part of your poem . . . some lines from the one

you called *Declaration*.

We agree

That beneath all endeavor

To build

What can be undermined

By error or insufficiency

There will be

A no matter what

Forever assumed.

Emilia

I remember someone—a collector, I think—who emphatically liked your painting when it was still untitled and not for sale. No one took his information, but I may know how to find him.

Keith

I'd like to just keep it with us for a while longer.

END

«[Previous Article](#) [Table of Contents](#) [Next Article](#)»

Evelyn Hooven graduated from Mount Holyoke College and received her M.A. from Yale University, where she also studied at The Yale School of Drama. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, she has had presentations of her verse dramas at several theatrical venues, including *The Maxwell Anderson Playwrights Series* in Greenwich, CT (after a state-wide competition) and *The Poet's Theatre* in Cambridge, MA (result of a national competition). Her poems and translations from the French have appeared in *ART TIMES*, *Chelsea*, *The Literary Review*, *THE SHOP: A Magazine of Poetry* (in Ireland), *The Tribeca Poetry Review*, *Vallum* (in Montreal), and other journals, and her literary criticism in Oxford University's *Essays in Criticism*.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](https://twitter.com/NERIconoclast)