

# Augustina

by Natasha Stith

She married in the Fall of 1937  
at the age of eighteen.

I imagine she met him on the shore of the Medveditsa  
Gathering herbs or berries in a basket,  
The breeze gently tugging at her hair,  
Beckoning her to turn and see his sun-kissed face  
Staring back at her,  
Ignoring the fish nibbling at his bait.

I imagine he was enraptured by her beauty  
and then charmed by her wit,  
and she was mesmerized by his sparkling blue eyes  
and then dazzled by his humor and kindness.

But more likely they were simply neighbors  
Who deemed marriage convenient  
Or even necessary for survival in the USSR.

I imagine her mother pinning up her auburn hair,  
Embellishing it with wildflowers or pearled hairpins,  
Smiling proudly at her lovely daughter  
In her new, elegant gown,  
Dreaming of all that her life would be,  
Could be,  
And hoping it would be even more than that.

But more likely she simply hoped her daughter  
Would have food and shelter and safety,  
And she wore the same threadbare dress as the day before  
And the day after.

I imagine a beautiful wedding  
In their town church  
Smiling faces of friends and family turned toward her  
As her father walked her down the aisle  
And her mother happily wept in the front pew.

But more likely they simply signed official documents  
As religion was banned,  
The pastor sent to gulag,  
The church was burned down,  
Five of her brothers were already murdered,  
And her father had died of starvation when she was three.

I imagine a honeymoon-like year,  
Full of love and kind gestures,  
Slow, relaxed mornings of sweet pleasures,  
Such simple moments of joy  
As they discovered each other  
And themselves.

But more likely they found solace in each other  
In the little time they had  
between the late end of the long workday  
and the early beginning of the next.

I imagine they sat down in the evenings  
At their cozy wooden table  
To share a meal made with love,  
And have warm conversations  
About their day and their dreams for their future  
together.

But more likely they were both withered and gaunt  
And ate a simple broth  
And a small portion of bread  
Before covering themselves with their thin, patched blanket  
And sleeping a deep but unsatisfying sleep.

I imagine a doting mother and playful father,  
An ever-growing household  
Full of children running through the kitchen  
With flour-smudged cheeks and grass-stained knees,  
Laughter and love building the walls  
Of a home.

But in reality they didn't have a chance  
As she was imprisoned and beaten for stealing grain  
that she did not take,  
and he was taken by the NKVD  
and shot  
for no reason at all.

I imagine their love...  
because they could not.