

Transcendence: *May Time Take These Bones, They Are Not Mine*
A poetry collection

by
Alice Bayly

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

Honors College

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Anthropology
(Honors Associate)

Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in French
(Honors Associate)

Presented May 3, 2021
Commencement June 2021

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Alice Bayly for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Anthropology and Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in French presented on May 3, 2021. Title: Transcendence: May Time Take These Bones, They Are Not Mine.

Abstract approved: _____

Jennifer Richter

This poetry collection shares the progression of my personal reflection and growth towards accountability, patience, and gratitude following a visit to Claresholm, Alberta – which I undertook with the intention of bringing myself closer to my late great-grandfather who lived there. The collection is called Transcendence because its sections progress through the realization that our physical bodies are connected to and accountable for all living things in a way that transcends the importance of the individual self. The sections: (1) May Time Take (2) These Bones (3) They Are Not Mine, address, respectively, the human relationship with time, the human experience with the self, and the accountability of the individual to the natural world. My goal for this collection is to take this inquiry and self-reflection a step further: with these poems, I aim to transcend my own thoughts and experiences and appreciate my connection to others by sparking this same personal reflection in my readers.

Key Words: Poetry collection, writing, environment, temporality, reflective, poems, reflection, time, ethnographic

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Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Anthropology and Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in French project of Alice Bayly presented on May 3, 2021.

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

Alice Bayly, Author

Transcendence:

May time take these bones, they are not mine

Alice Bayly

Transcendence

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Preface

I had been to the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump interpretive center in Alberta, Canada before. Once, maybe twice, the memories blur in my head. My grandma and I had come on an expedition to bring ourselves closer to my great grandfather who had died on New Year's Eve in 2010. The year was 2019. I was fascinated by the legacy my great grandfather, whose name was Wayne but who I call Papa, left behind. It was not a loud legacy, but a quiet whisper that passed between the lips of his descendants and his remaining living friends.

He was a man who would imprint you with the same feeling that settles in your chest when you watch the sun kiss the grass with golden lips just before dusk. Kind of amazing and pure and intangible. The impressions he left in his wake were overwhelmingly of admiration and positivity. When I asked his grandson-in-law if he could think of any person my Papa didn't like, there was a long and thoughtful pause before I received the response, "I remember Wayne didn't like dandelions."

We went to the buffalo jump because Papa used to love it there. My grandma told me that he liked to connect with the indigenous peoples near Claresholm because he connected more spiritually to them than to the Christian religion he was born to. Some weekends he would drive out to the buffalo jump just to be there and feel connected to the land. I could feel his love for this place as I pressed my eyes against the telescope lenses that focused on different aspects of the landscape. If I had not been intending to love it, the landscape would have looked barren and dry compared to the green forests of Oregon. But, with Papa's influence touching me, all I could think was how many colors appeared in grass that should have been only green.

When we finished our tour, we stepped into the giftshop that must have taken up less than 200 square feet. My grandma's eye was caught by a book on the Blackfoot language because, as a Linguistic Anthropology and French student, she knew it would interest me. We flipped through the pages.

I noticed that each word for a color ended with the same suffix “Naattsi.” Red is “Moahksi Naattsi” and yellow was “Otahkoi Naattsi.” Why were they the same? I asked my grandma what she thought this could mean. She took charge and brought the book to the checkout counter, asking the Blackfoot woman running the store if she could explain the colors to us and held out the page in question. The woman looked at the book and said, “Let me go get the old man,” and walked away.

When she returned, she was followed closely by Little Leaf. Little Leaf beckoned us to follow him and led us into a dimly lit room where the intricate colors of Blackfoot tapestries danced across the walls. In the center of the room there was a semicircle of pillows surrounding a metal chair. It was the kind of chair you might imagine seeing in a middle school classroom. Little Leaf motioned for us to sit on the pillows, and he sat on the chair. For the next two hours Little Leaf was our teacher.

He taught us about the origins of the Earth and the origins of the Blackfoot language. He spoke long about the history of his people before he answered my original question, but I did not mind. This was the most profound teaching experience of my life. I was not told to be there, nor was I obligated to stay. The only thing keeping my eyes pinned to Little Leaf and my ears extended to his words was my own inescapable curiosity and the beauty of his words. Finally, he said that the reason each color ends the same way is because the word does not contain just the word for a color, but the concept “I see.” So, Otahkoi Naattsi means “I see yellow.”

After he answered my initial question, he kept speaking. He was beginning to tell us about the Earth his people inhabit and their connection to it. He said, “We are all just” and blew on his hand “a breath in time.” I was enraptured by these words. As he continued speaking, I committed the moment to memory, repeating again and again the phrase “we are all just a breath in time” and reimagining the act of him blowing on his hand.

It has happened to me before that I have heard an assertion so impossibly connected to the depths of my being that I needed no further explanation to believe it as truth. This was one of those moments. His words

touched my most innate and crucial sense of self. They consumed me and I knew that whatever Little Leaf said next would be utterly and all-consumingly true. I was right. He said that because we are all just a breath in time nothing can really be owned. Everything is borrowed.

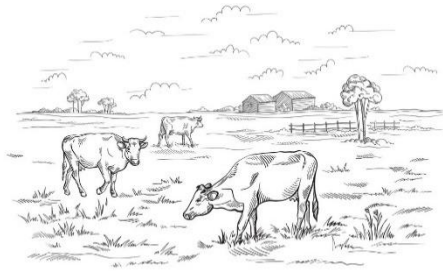
He said, "This Earth is a gift. It was given to us, but it is not ours. We must give it away." He gestured to the space around us, "This land is a gift, but it is not ours so we will give it away." He pulled on the fabric of his shirt, "This shirt is a gift, but it is not mine. I will give it away."

This lesson drew me closer to Papa - a man who, upon finding out he had cancer, said to his grandson who was driving him home, "You know what I could really go for right now? A cherry pie. Let's go get cherry pie." A man who would sit on the hill overlooking his property at a place called Trout Creek at the crack of dawn and at the last breath of dusk just to watch the beavers. A man who left a bad impression on no human and left a good impression on the land. Papa never showed greed or entitlement, only gratitude, and he lived every day in love with life. My grandma told me of a time when she was walking along with Papa, in his last year of life, Papa with a cane in each hand, less than half his teeth left in his mouth, and an arch in his back. Papa looked to her and said, "You know, I bet those young people look at me with my two canes, barely able to walk and think 'look at that old man, what has he got to live for?' But you know what, Della? I love life. I love being alive." Papa would avoid driving the same way twice to get anywhere because he loved getting lost, finding new places, and then finding his way home. I grew up hearing stories about him riding on his horse straight toward a bear following him because he had dropped his favorite hat. Papa used to watch me sleep when I was a child because he loved watching peacefulness. I learned that he loved the Earth, and A&W's coffee, and newspapers, and pie, and his family, and horses, and cowboy hats, and life.

Where could this attitude toward life come from if not from knowing that it is not yours to keep? Papa lived his life as if he would one day give it away. And, indeed, he spent most of his life giving things that were not his away. Hot cocoa, coffee, candies from the candy jar in his living room,

kindness, and compassion. The most important thing he gave, though, was a way of being. As Papa admired Trout Creek at the crack of dawn, he often had a friend, child, or grandchild with him who he had brought along for the experience. So, he shared not only the cocoa in his thermos, but the way the morning sun reflects itself on dewdrops speckled across Saskatoon bushes. When he took his nephew to get a cherry pie, he gave away his optimism. When he smiled despite his two canes, he gave Della hope for the goodness of life. When I traveled to Claresholm searching for traces of him, he gave me a love the Earth, and A&W's coffee, and newspapers, and pie, and family, and horses, and cowboy hats, and life.

I had been learning this lesson that Little Leaf was trying to teach me since the day I met Papa as a toddler, but I was hearing it for the first time. In the year that passed between my time with Little Leaf and the present, I have rediscovered this lesson everywhere. I have read it in every piece of literature, smelled it in every wheat field, heard it in the rustling leaves, felt it traveling through time to reach me and lingering in my bones. This lesson was a gift from Little Leaf and from Papa, but it is not mine. So, I will give it away.



In Memory of

*I don't think there has ever been anywhere
nicer. Never a nicer place to look at.
The columbines alone could do it.
They eat up the sides of the house
and just looking at them you know they
taste like honey. There are Herefords speckled
long across the fields. They have been here for 100
years, but never on fields like these.
I would drive long to Linden Creek and boy
did I love the place and the drive, there
were so many roads to go down and
get lost, but this wildflower adorned
mountainside paradise is beyond comparability
and even Trout Creek can't tug at a man's heart
the same way as this trickling stream.*

May Time Take

A breath in time

“We are all just,” he blew on his hand,
 “a breath in time.” A breath in time,
 that’s what Little Leaf said. What a
 beautiful thought. He blew on his hand.
 He must have felt warmth on his hand
 for a second as he showed us a breath in
 time. It ended quick as it had begun.

But people breathe deeply too. I did when I
 tried to find the beavers at Trout Creek. But
 they weren’t there so instead I watched the
 sunset and the face of a woman appeared
 in the sky and she was pink and she had wings.

And it was just the clouds. Just clouds in the
 setting sky, but oh she had wings. And the
 crickets sang and their voices sounded like
 the creek and the air was fresh and I looked
 at the pink woman and I listened to the creek
 and inhaled the sight of her and I inhaled the
 sound of it and I inhaled the fresh evening air
 in a breath that lasted an infinity of paused time.

I held my breath when Little Leaf blew on his
 hand. Does time ever hold her breath? If she
 does she did when I searched for the beavers.
 She did when I sat in A&W with my coffee. A
 breath in time, that’s what Little Leaf said. Whose
 breath? We each get our own breath in time
 otherwise we would all breathe out for the last time
 at the same time. And some breaths are shorter than
 others and some are long and some overlap.

Mine overlapped with my great grandfather’s,
 I call him Papa. I searched for the beavers
 because he used to watch them build as he
 shared a thermos of cocoa with whoever he
 brought along. I sat in A&W with a coffee because
 he used to drive to town just for a coffee at A&W.

Our breaths didn’t overlap for long. If we are just
 breaths in time, that begin and then end,
 lives that inhale until they exhale, then what
 do we do? What can we hope for? We are a breath
 in time, that’s what Little Leaf said. I am.

I hope I am a deep inhale through the nose,
one of those breaths so deep you can taste the
grass and the rain and crisp life fills your chest
from the inside out. That's how Papa lived.

And I know how he did it now. Little Leaf said
we're all just a breath in time - short and fleeting -
so most of us live quickly and frantically,
accomplishing all that we can before Little Leaf
ceases to feel warmth on his hand. But Papa didn't.

That's what they said about Papa. They said:

"One thing I can say about Wayne is that man
was never in a hurry."

Papa breathed patiently, in no hurry to get
the air in, in no hurry to let it out. And he tasted
the grass in each breath, and he saw the woman
in the sky, and he heard the creek in the air. So
I will breathe in deeply, and I will search the sky,
and I will open my ears and I will savor every
breath like it's my one breath in time
and I will live this way.

I will live this way.

Nowhere and somewhere

A completely random location,
Yet Papa had already been here.
He had hopped out of his pickup
And loosened the chain securing
The green fence to let us through.
I walked in and the trees smiled
At me and whispered about how
Much Papa used to love it here.

A completely random location,
Yet grandma and grandpa had
Already been here before me.
They collected burrs and waved
To the wolf, then drove home and
Discussed the yellow fabric they
Would buy to reupholster the couch.

A completely random location,
Yet I had already been here.
I stepped off the railroad tracks
And walked along the windswept
Bushes, buzzing along with the bees
And babbling back to the creek,
Popping berries in my mouth.

Hidden hours

The most precious moments
live within those crucial hours,
those hours hidden between
sun and sun, those hours
that don't really exist, when half
the world is dreaming and the other
breathes secrets.

Oh, hours soaked in wine,
the faithful get drunk and the
faithless stare at burning bushes.

Old lovers hold hands.

Almosts touch and then pull
away. Men hunt bears with telescopes.

Women bleed openly on canvases.

Limbs hang from chairs and hearts
hang from the ceiling. We lie
cradled in the arms of the hidden hours
and we watch ourselves rain.

Snakes slither from our mouths
and into each other's hands.

No one shudders at the shadow
on the horizon, the pendulum
on the wall whispers silence.

We all pull our hands from our pockets,
we reach for each other
and, for a moment, we touch.

Jane

And Time hesitated because she was scared of passing us by
on your front lawn as we brushed index fingers in the direction of the stars
and talked about the name Jane.

Time thought about doing something she couldn't do
like slow her steady pace to a stroll and maybe stop to watch us,
just a little longer.

She spent the evenings watching us in the bed of your new truck
with our heads thrown back, our wine glasses clinking,
talking about the name Jane.

She looked helplessly at her feet, she looked helplessly at us.

She was strung between us as we each sat in new brick buildings,
as we watched our friends wave and shut the doors behind them,
then camped beside our phones. Our fingers twiddled with plastic cords
and we passed the name Jane across the sky.

Time tilted her head and tried to double back.

We faced each other hand in hand in front of our family and friends,
then ducked into a shiny limo. That night we loved
each other fondly, then we lay in our bed and
whispered the name Jane.

Time cursed her feet and watched us sadly as we talked the night to sleep.

You squeezed my hand and Time hesitated because she was scared of passing
us by
in that white room as we shared jello from a paper cup,
on the day we met Jane.

Time did something she did not know she could do
and began to cry as she watched Jane sleep.

She spent days with us in the bed of your old truck, clinking
our juice boxes, Jane sitting on your knee.

In vain, Time reached out to us and shuddered
at the sound of her own footsteps.

She walked beside us as we took photos and blew kisses
before Jane entered a new brick building, waving at us as the
doors shut behind her.

Time stamped her foot and bit her lip.

Jane hugged our knees,
Jane brought home papers for the fridge,
Jane kissed us goodnight, Jane played us songs,
Jane made us proud,
then Jane entered another new brick building.

Time screamed at us, a ghost we could neither see nor hear.

One night, Jane came home from some boy's front lawn
with a new name on her lips, and we hesitated
because we were scared of passing her by.

And Time smiled sadly at us, because she knew she had passed us by.

Why does a river flow?

The sky outside looks gloomy
And we come in from the rain
With coldness drenched into our skin
As raindrops burst against the pane.
We would be shivering and numb
But for the fire in the hearth
And our tangled heartstrings harmonizing
With each other and the heartbeat of the Earth.
We hang together in an unnamed
Space hidden safe from time
And smile at how easily
Our hearts' melodies all rhyme.
This moment is our own with our
Heartstrings all aflame
And tying themselves together
Sharing chords just like a name.

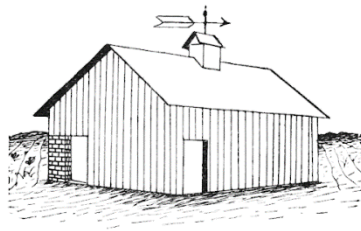
One swift raindrop slams against the
window and the warmth vanishes,
the hearty strumming stops
and I am alone, in the same cabin -
beside a dark and dripping hearth.
Not a sound touches the silence,
save the obscured beating of the Earth.
Had I been caught in an illusion?
I look at the ghost of the hearthfire and my
mind conjures the image of a
skipping rock
who swiftly skids across the sea
and I think of what would happen to her
if she got caught up in the scenery
and paused a moment to look back
at where she came from.

Follow me

Ignore my rickety boards,
My loose rusty nails,
 Just use your feet
 And follow me.
 Follow me around
The corner, follow
 Me around the bend
 Even I don't know,
 In my old age,
 Where these
 Tracks end.

echoes

He wipes his forehead,
leaving a smudge behind, then
swings his hammer up behind him.
Clank, the hammer sinks into the tracks.
He swings the hammer back again, *clank, clank, clank*.
The sound reverberates across time and sends chills down my spine.
I look down to the tracks and see the spike he struck.
It sits on its side, rusted in the middle of the
tracks. I bend down and pick it up.
Clank, I breathe out “hello,”
and listen, wondering
if he can hear me.



Wayne Lewis

Elsie and I have never been rich in the monetary sense of the word, but our chairs in the living room are so comfortable and they are both shifted inward slightly so they face each other. The clouds opened for me and her when we found this place, though she wanted to drive fewer miles one way or the other when we left Linden Creek. Children's voices sing in the sun that sets behind this mountain and I think she hears it too, and so I trust she knows that we have something our bank accounts don't.

These Bones

In a Wheat Field

In a flushed moment between
The sixth and the seventh day,

The pink face of the Mother emerged
From the clouds and gazed upon
The curves of naked women
Carved into the Earth below.

The women slept peacefully
And a crease, like a smile,
Stretched across the clouds
And a pink light seeped through.

She would not look away,
For She wanted to meet them
And kiss them when they woke.

As the Mother waited patiently,
A chill crept across the horizon
And into the field.

The mother shuddered,
And a cruel golden glow yawned
In the distance.

The Mother wanted to urge
Her daughters awake,
But she had no voice.

And as she watched, her eye filled
With tears as her innocent daughters
Smiled in their sleep.

The glow stretched nearer to the
Mother, clawing toward her
Across the sky.

She shed her first tear and soon the field
Was drenched with the agony of a Mother
Who doesn't want to leave her children.

The sound of impending darkness
Cloaked the world
In silence.

She brought a purple hand to
Her face and dragged it slowly
Down her cheek as she wept.

The glowing mouth burned brighter.

The smooth lines of the wheat field
Began to shift restlessly in their sleep
As their Mother's hand stopped to cover
Her eye, and her face stilled.

A golden dagger punctured
The purple, and a deep voice whispered
That there can only be One.

But the dagger did not aim for the Mother,
Instead it pierced the bodies of her daughters
Who twitched with discomfort, still in their sleep.

The clouds tore open with shrieks of horror
And sky collapsed on itself,
Then the world was grey.
The rain ceased and the field was only a field.

All that remained on the bed of wheat was
A bone.

A man knelt beside the bone
And his rough hands caressed
Its soft curves.
He took up a spade, dug
Up the flesh of the Earth,
And planted the bone in her wound.

Then a dark hand swept over the ground
And a dark cloud swept over the sky
On the final Eve of Creation.

Stains Under the Sun

The smell of rain runs
Across my memory,
Staining it like a cheek,
The taste of nutmeg still
Vague on my tongue

The horizon was a hole
In the ground
And the summer sun a curious
Groundhog that slipped away
When we moved

The rain began to fall,
Creating oceans out the window,
Then I was knee-deep in water
Staring in wonderment
At the changing leaves
Falling, circling, spinning
And one landed in my hair,
You pulled it gently from
My head, handed it to me,
And I submerged

The smell of a space heater
Pierces through the rain
And warms my toes,
My hair begins to curl
As it dries by the heater
I jump at the click of the kettle
And the nutmeg touches my tongue

You drape a blanket around
My shoulders, and I am
Submerged again
Wave after wave crashes
Over my head and cold
Hair clings to my stained
Cheeks, dry leaves
Crunch beneath my feet
Sticking to my leather boots

I laugh or I scream
And the sky blushes down
At me as I splutter on the porch

Then the kettle clicks and I jump
And close my eyes to better
Savor the nutmeg
Warmth spreads from the space heater
To my toes and my hair
Begins to curl
I hold a steaming mug
To my lips and inhale

I feel a warm hand on my back and
I plunge into the deep once more
I am gone
Water fills my nose
My eyes my lungs

Then I am here,
I am home
With a space heater
At my feet
And tears staining
My memory but
Not a trace of nutmeg
Even when I close my eyes

I see a pen and an old grocery list
Sitting on the table
I flip over the list and I
Almost write you, asking
You to hurl me into the ocean
Like you used to
So I can taste the nutmeg again.

The Path

The trouble is, I don't know where I'm going.
I never truly believed that I might walk this path.
When we started, I scarcely skimmed the idea
of walking these tangled woods together, to find a clearing
that smells like fall, where the rain has just stopped
and where there lies a quaint cabin that feels like home.
People tell stories of strolling this path hand in hand,
but it always seemed like a vague and subjective state of mind.
An imagined cabin in a made-up clearing, painted into our
minds by alluring strokes of speech like "feels like home."
I had never consciously rejected the idea, nor had I accepted it.
I mistrusted the glamorous stories, for how real could be
a journey to a destination that has no map?
But I've stumbled onto the path.

drifters

on a night where shadows
reign over everything
except the reflection of a
yellow rock skipping
across black waters and
the occasional masthead lights
of fellow drifters

when the only thing that
damages the impenetrable pit
is the pale gaze of the moon,
where every turn becomes a
finger pointing in the wrong direction
and all the trees have fingers,
when time's heartbeat falters as
the midnight hour absorbs it

on a night when, if you were alone,
you would be too scared to cry

there is a familiar face looking
up from the compass
and the eyes of a friend crack
the darkness with a lighthearted shrug
you open your arms to the night air
and become castaways together,
surrendering the helm to the undead
hours of the night as the undead
wind whispers the sails on an undead
journey toward a breathing
destination on the sea

My haunted breath

Don't create a monster
On the tip of my tongue
In the homeland of the dead
All ears here created deaf
Revive them with science
Victor's cold science
Heal the bated breath
The phantoms in my lungs
Restless graveyards in my head
Haunted by the silence
Haunting the silence
In my throat they hanged
Lay them on the metal bed

Please undo all the deaths

Sew together the fragments

The cold undead fragments

But don't create a monster

How's the Serenity?

It was a moment molded
by the gentle hands of serenity.
The gracefully setting sun
collapsed into the skyline,
her skirt billowing behind her
as if it were water.
The chilled lips of autumn's
most precious evening greeted
the moment we were inhabiting
with a kiss, a kiss that stayed
in our skin as we played
the moment through.

Because we were on the set
of an old, classic movie,
we took the role of actors
in a movie-perfect world,
and *it was* perfect.
The moment was crisp air,
it was still water, it was
an unmoving hand
and the absence of that
monotonous ticking,
it was a moment hidden within
moments, it was patient like an
old rancher, in no hurry
to meander us by.
It was a moment that knew how to last.
And we held it on our tongues.

The wind pinched our cheeks
as we walked onto the set.
There was a castle before us
and water beyond it,
remnants of that billowing skirt.
We were children, we scaled
the walls, we balanced
on the bars, we imagined
climbing the fence out loud,
we slid on the railings,
we laughed like it was ages ago
when we walked the world
on clumsy legs. Somehow
we still do. We held each other
and the moment held us all.

If there was any sound beyond
that of our own mild
conversation and our feet
on the walls,
I do not remember it.

If there was another
living being nearby,
I do not remember it.

If there was even a second when
that evening was not crisp
and sweet
and pure,
I do not remember it.

If we were ever anything
other
than what we became
then,

I do not remember it.

unravel

be you a thread strung
 through the fabric of memory,
 like the sand in my hair

carefully stitched
 are the mornings, the
 feet on chairs, the click
 of the electric kettle

poke holes through the cotton
 then fill them, stitch, stitch,
 stitch the temperamental
 screen door slams,
 a walk at dusk, bars
 on the playground

knit one over the
 other, cards over basketball
 pass under the sound of
 crickets, crickets over the hum
 of an engine pass under
 breath on my cheek

weave them together, like
 breath on my cheek in
 the morning later we
 walk at dusk I get
 sand in my hair
 my feet on your chair
 the screen door slams
 on the kettle and cards
 then crickets

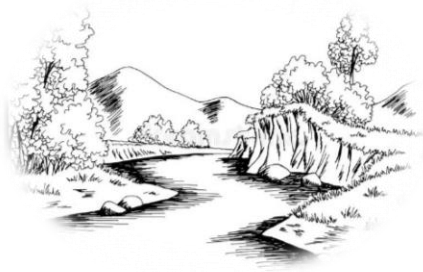
crickets

bring the edges together,
 sew the stars on my ceiling
 to your bedside table
 with my shaking hand

ah but poorly done

run my thoughts
 along the messy

seem, find
the end, pull the
thread, pull
the thread,
pull the thread,



1921 - 2010

When I heard what the doctor had to say, Riley was with me. I didn't mind, but I think he did, so we went to get chocolate pie and took the long way home. Though the sky shines rightly down upon me and no man has ever had such a blessed and wonderful family, I can't find it in me to be sad as I see them opening above me again, ready to close, because I don't believe there are better things coming that I don't yet understand. I look at the hills and the dirt roads of Meadow Creek and I think maybe all those preachers got it wrong. If there is a paradise where man experiences the most unworldly and unnamable pleasures, I would be inclined to believe that it is here and not there.

They Are Not Mine

Everything and nothing

One night I looked up at the stars
 And I did not love them.
 I made my way upon a moonlit
 Path I walk often and the night
 Exhaled cool breath on my neck.
 I looked up to meet the gaze
 Of my lover and shuddered
 At what I saw. Her gaze expanded
 On and on without ending
 and in it I saw all the planets in the sky,
 I saw them collide with one another
 in the distance, in the future.
 I saw eyes buried in the ground,
 I saw the sound of a newborn baby
 wailing at the sight of life's hideous face.
 I saw the lighted windows of ancient
 buildings, I saw those buildings collapse.
 I saw ships sinking in the ocean and
 I saw myself in my mother's arms.
 I saw my mother in my grandmother's arms.
 I saw my grandmother and a pair
 of arms I did not recognize.
 I saw millions of arms.
 I saw prunes buried in the dirt and
 nothing growing from them.
 I saw millions of arms digging up prunes
 and crying over them.
 I saw everything and nothing.

Instead of the eyes of my lover,
 I was met by the unforgiving gaze
 of Insignificance, he slapped me
 hard across the face. I collapsed
 to the ground in a fit of earthquakes
 so forceful the wind herself cried
 for someone to help me.
 I gasped for air and it filled my lungs
 Like water until I was
 spluttering on the ground like
 a drowning fish. The weight of the sky
 was upon me. My eyes watered the
 grass with self pity and it shriveled like
 the rest of us. I felt the prune in my chest.

I heard someone whisk down beside me,

Gratitude gently lifted my chin,
caressed my face with her soft hands,
and then kissed me and pointed to the sky.
I looked up once more and I saw the Earth
beneath my feet. I saw a collision in the past.
I saw wild eyes on the horizon.
I saw the first footsteps
of a child, I saw a newborn gripping her
mother's finger. I saw the lighted windows
of ancient buildings, I saw movement within them.
I saw ships taking to the ocean and I saw myself in my mother's arms.
I saw my mother in my grandmother's arms. I saw my grandmother
In a pair of arms vaguely familiar. I saw millions of arms.
I saw plums growing on trees and millions of arms reaching out to touch
them.
I saw nothing and everything. I felt the plum in my chest, still ripe.

And I loved the stars again.

Miracles in the Dustlight

Two delirious things
Collide in an explosion
Of light and emotion
And create
Possibility.

Such a collision was a
Rare and delicate
Occasion itself.

The gravity of the one
Enraptured the other and suddenly...
Possibility.

And waves of wonder and
Potential crash over everything
In sight, everything
Beyond sight
Until every spinning mass,
Every falling leaf,
Every gleaming eye,
Is soaked in the sensational
Beauty of things
That could be.

And something like dust motes
Trails across the expanse,
Insignificant and crucial and circling,
Spinning, hurtling across the miles,
Millions of twinkling eyes,
Blinking across trillions of years,
Endless orbiting spheres in the distance, powerful and pure,
Swirling through the void like a river in the sky
Charged with everlasting light and life,
Or maybe it is only dust motes catching
The morning light through the window.

Could one outshine the other?
In both the dustlight and the Milky Way -
There is silence.
All breath catches and
Sound cannot survive
In the presence of such innocent,
Such infinite
Possibility.

Tiny spinning bodies circling
Around the larger,
Their source of light and life -
Or soft and tiny fingers closing
Around the larger,
A new life and source of light.

These brilliant possibilities,
The unplanned and perfect
Gravity, the beautiful calamities,
Passing through the dust motes
Floating in the stars,
These miracles!

So fatally vital and nothing,
Nothing,
Is more beautiful.
But which miracle is the more beautiful?

A cry out into the world or an explosion
Swallowed by silence.
The fingers in the dustlight,
Or the far away eyes in the void?

Perhaps it does not matter,
For, truly,
What is the difference?

Bellfountain Rd.

If I was a religious woman,
I would dream of these fields.
St. Peter would wait
For me at a left turn
On a gravel road
And I'd pull my car up
To a faded barn.
Sunbeams would trickle
Through the clouds
And the pitter patter of
Greens and yellows and
Oranges and pinks and blues
Would speckle the ground.
I would get out of my car,
But I wouldn't lock it.
The cows would tilt their
Heads at me, then return
To their quiet grazing.
I would walk into the field
And lay down. I'd feel the
Wheat tickle my fingers
And tickle my toes and
For a moment, I would cry,
But then I'd look up at the sky
And inhale deeply
And smell the country
And feel the wind
And hear the wheat
And I would smile,
Then I'd close my eyes.

Edna's Sunroom

I wake from a
Deep slumber and find
Myself back in my own bed.
I stretch, thinking what a
Beautiful adventure it was.
I close my eyes and try
To remember it. I feel
Around for a smile, a
Laugh, a touch, but
they are faint and fading
Still, like the whisper of
A dream I forgot years ago,
A delicate and passing thought
Already cascading over the
Edges of my memory,
Far too sweet to linger,

Far

too

far

away

to

hold

The request

Will you write me a letter? I don't need it today
Or tomorrow, just someday - please.

Tell me her lips are the kind of dark pink that is almost red,
Tell me her dark hair dives down her back and across her shoulders
And that it's messy and tangled from the weather.
Say that she double knots her shoes, unless she's in a hurry,
Or if it's warm outside - she doesn't wear shoes at all.

Describe her favorite color to me, and the dress she
Wore to her first dance. Tell me she was light on her feet,
And her image was soft on your heart.

Paint the sound of her laugh with a stroke of your pen
And tell me the sort of things she laughs about.
Does she love the little ducklings as I do?

Don't tell her you're writing the letter,
This is just between you and me,
Hide in your room and tell me all about her,
Tell me what music she listens to, tell me how
Many hearts she has broken, tell me
That she sneaks out at night, or tell me that
She would never break the rules and that she
Shuts herself in her room to do her homework.
Tell me she sings karaoke with her friends, that she
Made the softball team, that she sniffles when she cries,
Tell me she has my eyes.

Write me this letter someday and then burn it
In the fireplace, watch it curl up and singe around the edges,
And I'll watch the edges appear in my own little hearth
Seeping slowly inward to reveal your long cursive letters.

And please don't tell me that she would have made me proud,
But that I would have made her proud,
Say she would have kissed my cheeks
Say that she would have loved me.

Intimacy

I hear a drumming on the rooftop, like a
Pebble beckoning me to the window.
I open the back door and step onto the porch.
A drop of water splashes on my bottom lip.
The drumming intensifies and I hear laughter in it,
laughter from the night my girls and I stumbled
across the sand together with intoxication on our lips.
We laughed into the salty air, took off our clothes,
and ran down the beach. The wind reached out to
touch me. Though my mind was befuddled and drunk,
I could feel her touch in hyperreality. She touched me
in technicolor. She curiously and gently brushed my
cheeks, my back, my sides. My girls had disappeared.
Then my naked toes splashed into the water and the
chill trembled through my bones, tingling, electric,
authentic, alive. I smiled and dove forward. Cool water
Cascaded down my back and awakened every inch of my body.
My head submerged and when I resurfaced, I think I screamed.
Life pulsed through me, the heartbeat of the earth -
through the water, through the sand. I was wearing nothing
but my skin in the water, it was just me and the water.
Just my body and her body, embracing each other.
Just the world and me. How intimate, how pure!
My mind was clear, my senses were sharp and I touched
my soul for the first time. That moment, I collapsed in love.
My first love, a hopeless love. She held me and she
does still. I stand here in the rain looking at her and I think
of how my body is hers just as hers is mine. This is it.
The rain streams down my face, drips from my hair,
Down my shirt, slides across my legs, runs like cool
Fingers over my entire body, awakening, electrifying,
Pure, even after all this time, after all these years.
This is all there is, this one love that will never die.

The Meadow Crossing

The sun bends down to kiss the
Horizon and the trees sigh,
A deer stands fixed in the tall
Grass of the meadow crossing.
Cool shadows pass across its
Face over the lifetime of a night,
In the hours of a fleeting moment.
Its wide eyes transfix my gaze as
If there were three moons tonight
Watching shadows pass over me,
My own eyes reflect both sun and
Moonlight in the space between
Dark and life. Two more moons.
And here I sit, sinking into the tall
Grass of the meadow crossing,
Naked in the moonlight, slinking
Into the shadows where no glowing
Rocks can search me. The deer
Stays there and stands tall in the
Grass of the meadow crossing until
The sun lifts on tiptoes to kiss the
Horizon and the trees inhale.
Calm yellow soothes the cold
Shadows of night, painting blue
In their place. I stand up in the tall
Grass of the meadow crossing,
Gazing at my brave companion.
It snaps its head up, and meets
My eyes, then bolts into the trees.



"I remember Wayne didn't like dandelions"