

# *Air Over Bone*



*Kelli Anna*

a collection of poetry

## *For My Circle of Poets*

There are only glowing coals left in the fire  
and the conversation has run out, but  
my heart is still warm and my body light  
because I know I've found my tribe -  
my people gathered 'round tonight.

Even though they're scattered across  
the world, I hold them close in hand.

Words to warm me.  
Poets to rhyme me.  
A circle to hold me.  
Glad they found me.

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I Dedicate This to You  
thank you for reading this small offering of poetry

# *Part One*

## *If I Were a Poem*

If I were a poem,  
I would ramble on and not rhyme.  
A free form poem found in the pages  
of a thick anthology you  
have to pay to appear in, bought  
from an ad in the back of a poetry magazine.

If I were a cup of coffee,  
I'd be made from cheap grounds  
bought in a tin can, then warmed over  
to drink again the next morning.  
Bitter and sweetened with white sugar  
and powdered creamer.

If I were a snowflake,  
I'd be the late winter snow  
that falls tentatively, big wet flakes  
pushed around by the rough March wind,  
unsure where to land and  
melted by mid-afternoon.

If I were a crayon,  
I'd be the still sharp Olive Green,  
passed over for the more exciting  
Wild Strawberry or the exotic sounding Cerulean.  
Waiting patiently in the box for someone  
to color an army man or a martini.

What I am is human.  
A rambling, warmed over, unsure where to land human,  
whose colors clash with the world.  
Not for the masses, I am perfectly  
fine for those who color the grass  
Olive Green while sipping yesterday's coffee.

# *Hungry for Words*

Write about the cicadas.

Write about how the sun  
lighting the top of a morning cloud  
makes you almost believe in heaven.

Write about how the sound  
of the wind in the leaves  
makes you want to weep.

Write about hunger.  
Write about discontent.  
Write about your anger at the establishment.

Write about the dying off and the rebirth.

Write about the early fall and the late spring  
and the long winter in between.

Write like you mean it.

These words are more  
than just palatable  
appetizers for a hungry mob.

They're the main dish. Flavor them well.



# *Where My Lines Break*

Maybe I like the way  
my lines  
break.

The way my stanzas flow

one into the other  
with a cadence  
pleasing to my ear.

Don't try to  
analyze the meaning,  
to diagram my  
sentences. For

I am made of words.

My blood pumps verbs,  
my lungs breathe prepositions  
in and out and in.

I write rhymes upon my skin,  
brush metaphors from my hair,

and it all lands here -

in the places my lines  
break,

in the way my stanzas flow.

I am made of words  
and that will  
always define me.

## *These Aren't the Days for Poetry*

These aren't the days for this.

For tying words together  
through the loops of shoelaces.  
For sandwiching metaphor  
between peanut butter and jelly.  
For stanzas stacked among  
school books on the kitchen table.

These aren't the days for poetry.

For lines linked through arms  
in a game of Ring-Around-the-Rosie.  
For pouring sonnets onto paper  
as white as milk, dunking  
in a couplet or two.

These aren't the days for this.

I'm needed elsewhere -  
washing clothes, dishes, and faces.  
Fixing lunch, toys, and disagreements.

These poems don't fit the days,  
yet I birth the words, mother the lines,  
and claim the stanzas as my own.

# *I Want to Write*

I want to write  
but there are dishes to do  
and the words get washed away

I want to write  
but the laundry is waiting  
and my words get lost on the folds

I want to write  
but there is dinner to make  
and my words get swallowed whole

I want to write  
but it's time for bed  
and my words are forgotten in dreams

I want to write...  
I want to write...  
I want to write...

## *Waiting On Words*

She complains of the puddles,  
but, really, on a hill where  
else can the water run but down?

Always down to the lowest point.

I've songs to distract me from  
the watery complaints,  
verses to pick apart,  
choruses to mine for meaning.

The lyrics gather like pinecones  
on wet cement steps. Like  
skittish deer, the white freckled  
fawns keeping a distance.

Delicate hooves on wet flower petals.

Still I'm waiting on the words.  
Always waiting on words.

## *Her Poetry*

Her Poetry moves me forward  
across stepping stones rising  
from pretty forest pools, a  
sanctuary to rest awhile.

Her Poetry rises like the  
heads of sea creatures from  
the violent waves, caught in  
the rage of her tropical storm.

Her Poetry brings the hush  
of a long ride home, the  
last train leaving at midnight  
from a dark, empty station.

Her Poetry brings peace  
on the wings of paper cranes,  
rains hope like cherry petals  
filling the street after *hanami*.

Her Poetry echoes through  
the empty house on my  
cries of too soon goodbyes,  
still lives in her silent pen.

Her Poetry leaves me desperate  
for reason between line breaks -  
no reason when the lines break  
and the poet falls through.

The late afternoon light  
gives new life to common things.

Turns a pan of dishes,  
rings of fresh sliced onion  
into something that  
moves a poet's heart.

# *Masters of Autobiography*

We have become masters  
of autobiography,  
sharpening our pens on  
the grit of our stories.

Seeking redemption  
through confession

forgiveness through  
anonymous eyes.

Selling out our  
narrative for  
the price of a heart -

a shot of dopamine  
in exchange for blood.

Identity commodities  
trading in popularity.

# *The Tribe of Paper and Pen*

I seek to capture  
the beauty of the  
movement of everyday life

in still words meant  
to move your heart.

A practice perhaps only  
appreciated by poets.

Lost souls calling out to each  
other through line and verse -

the secret language of the  
Tribe of Paper and Pen.



An evolving universe exists on this screen  
poets in orbit around shared words  
held in place by a familiar gravity

## *Captive Poetry*

Someone stole the words  
straight from your rich man's pen.  
Someone bound your hands  
with the gold band you paid for.

Someone cast a death spell  
on your overflowing inkwell

and when Someone took you  
from your clan  
you went willingly -

because Someone felt  
so much like a place  
you once called home.

I've taken a muse  
whose face shapes my lines.

Binds rhyme to a form  
warm with still fresh ink.

Sink into the page  
caged by my harsh pen.  
When words drift away,  
lay them at my feet.

## *Flightless*

You landed like a feather  
on my empty page. So  
soft and light that  
my slightest exhale  
moved you. My slight  
movement grasped  
you where you fell.  
Inky hands held your  
secrets safe, wrapped  
tight in my mother tongue.  
Brought forward only  
in the dark where my  
hips wait for the  
weightless touch of  
your whispered words.  
Wait for you to fall  
softly like a lost  
feather on a blank  
page, flightless, and  
looking for shelter.

## *Shelter Me*

I'm not supposed to  
want to be saved.

I'm supposed to pick  
up my bow and arrow  
and hunt my own meat.

But there's something  
cave woman in me  
that wants to see  
you walking towards me,  
a fresh kill over wide shoulders,  
wants to know you'll provide.

Will you provide for me?

I'm not supposed to  
want to be saved.

I'm supposed to stand  
up for myself and rush  
to my own self defense.

But there's something  
primeval in me  
that longs to feel  
your protective arm thrown  
across my body in the night,  
wants to be sheltered.

Will you shelter me?

# *Wild Horses*

The summer of  
the wild horses  
and mountain drives,

was also the summer  
of too much tequila,  
fighting until sunrise,  
and sleeping it  
off until dusk.

We hide that summer  
like our own  
secret history,  
arranging the pieces  
like a tangram,  
into a picture that  
suits us when we  
are forced to talk about it.

Sometimes I dream  
we're back in Colorado,  
high in the mountains  
where we couldn't  
catch our breath,

waiting for the wild  
horses to carry us away.

## *Elk Herd*

First night in the mountains  
moved west of midwest.  
Warm truck cab,  
night time milk run.

There in the headlights,  
the passing brown of  
a crossing elk herd.

Majestic in their step.

Mouths open  
we stared,  
milk forgotten.

Months later,  
a windy night,  
a suggestive phrase,  
a near miss -

all resting on  
the backs of  
an elk herd in  
the headlights  
and a gallon  
of warm milk.

## *Something Hypocritical*

They once would  
count the time  
and conform  
to something hypocritical.

Little life.

Rich desirable things.

Stupid cliches.

Another love:

easy, better.

Another imaginative  
bunch of color.



# *Possession*

Something new,

unused,  
unsoiled,

sits folded.

Waiting  
for a hand to  
pick it up,

use it to wipe  
up spilled coffee,  
to add the first stain.

Possession seems to lie

not in the having,  
but in the using.  
And ultimately,

in the soiling.

# *Trapped*

Our life has  
become so small

that we can hold  
it in our hands  
like a child holds  
a trapped moth -

gently, as not  
to break the  
powdery wings.

We think it's  
safe, flapping wildly  
in that too small space.

Until we open our hands  
and realize they are  
full of shiny powder,  
and not much else.

## *A Picture of Morning*

I found the craving silence  
hidden beneath spinning fan blades  
tucked in the hum of cooling coils  
layered in the white noise of mass produced morning.

I found his wanting words  
in the only stories he was  
allowed to tell. Carefully crafted  
replies to create the distance he needs to feel.

I found the morning color  
in a picture of sunrise reflected  
in dew on the Japanese Maple.  
A droplet waiting to fall and wake the tired world.

I thought I found forever love  
but love grew old and thin  
no longer covering my cold arms  
and shaky legs with the graying fabric of apathy.

Now I've lost myself in the silence  
of his words on a morning of old love  
that's become so thin  
I can see right through it.

## *Bitter Pill*

Always  
what you think I  
need to hear drips in thick  
honeyed words from your stinging lips.

Always  
there's a bitter pill hidden in  
the sugar, choking me  
in sweet surprise,  
Always.

## *In Bottles Like a Potion*

I cast my love letters to the ocean  
when the water churns like witch's brew.  
Incantations sealed in bottles like a potion.

When my heart breaks in waves of emotion,  
when I can't fathom the loss of you,  
I cast my love letters to the ocean.

Letters from the dark depths of devotion,  
whisperings of forever long overdue.  
Incantations sealed in bottles like a potion.

The tides bring my stagnant life motion,  
buoy me when I feel I can't continue.  
I cast my love letters to the ocean,

lost in frothy white-capped commotion,  
as if I believe in these voodoo  
incantations sealed in bottles like a potion.

I can never accept the notion  
that your intentions were so untrue.  
I cast my love letters to the ocean.  
Incantations sealed in bottles like a potion.

# *Part Two*

## *Air Over Bone*

What do I sound like  
in the places where air  
vibrates over bone?

My breath falling  
on eardrums like  
pebbles into  
clear water,  
or snow onto  
a waiting  
park bench.

The interrupted  
air pulling at  
the memory of  
an innocent place  
where your mother  
fed you, leaving you  
like a new robin's egg -

blue and fragile and  
crushed on concrete

Suddenly knowing  
how craving waits  
in the mouth as  
the flesh of a  
juicy cantaloupe,  
while hunger lives  
deep in the belly  
as the gnawing  
of a bear at  
a steel trap.

My breath over bone

makes you hunger.

For snow,  
for innocence,  
for flesh in a  
craving mouth.



## *The Step of the Mammoth*

Let the curve of the moss guide you  
through the makeshift doorway  
where the ferns remember the  
step of the mammoth and  
the air craves the sound of  
a flute carved of bone.

These woods remember the  
breath of spears thrown  
through an impossible silence.

Our footfalls are too loud  
to hear the stories that  
hang in the gathering mist. -

we must know stillness to listen to  
the call of the hunt,  
the cry of the beast,  
the voice of impending extinction.

## *Inner Space*

For a while the sky took on  
the color of tornadoes.

I sensed rotation at  
the edges of the clouds,

and retreated to the depths  
to weather the storm.

Tucked away among  
Christmas decorations  
and old vinyl records,  
hidden in the smell  
of fabric softener,  
I listened to the rain  
echoing in the window well.

Nursing guilt for finding  
comfort in the rain,  
while so much of the  
world is drowning.

Even when the threat  
had passed, when the  
thunder grew distant,

I stayed among the  
familiar boxes, rediscovering  
myself in the solitude

of a passing storm,  
coveting the silence  
of rain that no longer falls.

## *Cicada Song*

The cicada song is quieter now.  
Not reaching the siren pitch of even a week ago.

I find them on the sidewalk,  
stuck between blades of grass in the lawn,

barely able to manage a buzz of their wings.

They're dying. Like the bees,  
like the zinnias and the sunflowers  
and the black-eyed Susans.

If only everything could go out  
in a blaze of color like the leaves.

The world set on fire just  
before it all turns to ice.

## *Autumn Come at Last*

The sun shone weakly from  
its place behind a haze,  
as if preparing for the  
coming shorter days.

While I slept,

November slipped through  
the thin veil of Samhain.  
Arriving in my backyard  
as a cold, soaking rain,

a wind with the smell  
of woodsmoke from the past,  
and a feeling in my limbs  
of autumn come at last.

## *An Offering*

I gather acorns like  
a hungry squirrel,  
or a small child at play.

I seek out the ones with  
their caps still on tight,  
like old fashioned workmen  
resting on the ground before  
they begin the hard job  
of becoming trees,

Instead of hiding them  
away for the winter,  
I arrange them on the  
makeshift altar of a tree stump.  
Like an offering to the forest gods.

In thanks for the shade,  
for the birdsong.  
In thanks for the solitude  
that feeds my pen.

## *Hunting Season*

The deer won't come to the salt.  
Although I offer them haven,  
they smell blood on the ground,  
sense death hanging in the trees.

The deer won't come to the salt.  
The wind carries fear and  
the lick stinks of human hands  
seeming godlike in their wrath.

The deer won't come to the salt.  
The taste reminiscent of loss,  
I wake to a silent season of hiding  
on a hazy gunpowder morning.

## *Another Life*

A thousand lives walked  
on foggy roads of  
endless autumns,  
in footsteps that  
never leave a trace.

A heathen child  
playing with simplicity  
never claims a spot  
on the line of time.

Never carries a name  
into future existence.

Only fades into the  
static background noise  
of pastoral mediocrity,

only cries out like  
a lamb in the rain.

## *Leaf Strewn Morning*

strong coffee after a  
fevered forehead night  
spent resting hands on  
backs radiating heat

the rain washed day  
won't wait for us to rest

moves on the slowed  
time of dark morning  
as winter closes in



Leaves fall around me  
like remnants of love letters  
thrown to a cold wind.

## *Sunset Unstrung*

Woven strings of pink and purple  
form a tapestry of sunset sky.

Do you notice the way the rays  
settle upon a single clutch of trees,  
as though they're the chosen ones?  
As if trying to save them from the  
wilting of late November as it kills  
the innocence born in April.

You never stop to notice the way  
night descends slowly as though  
the threads are being unstrung  
to reveal the blackness behind.

You're so mired in movement,  
You never stop to see the winter  
gathering in the golden puddles,  
arriving midday on storm clouds.

You only see how it stops you  
from the work to be done.

Never the beauty in the strings  
of sunset unstrung, urging us to  
pause and gather the loose threads.

I'll gather them alone, but please leave  
the porch light burning to guide me home.

There's always too much work to be  
done, and sometimes you forget  
how easily I get lost in the darkness,  
how loudly I'm called to bed down  
in the wool of an unraveled sunset.

## *Haiku on the Wind*

reading the  
art of haiku in  
an ice storm

windmill blades  
cut silently through  
frozen air

energy  
revolving, captured  
on the wind

insight stored  
in *kigo* of dead  
zen masters

## *First Snow*

I should be watching the first  
snow of the season gather  
on last year's fallen logs.

*like a soft meditation*

Instead of scrolling through news  
making me sad and angry  
making me crave a hermitage.

*noise demanding attention*

Fat flakes gathering on freshly  
fallen leaves ask nothing of me.  
They fall whether I see them or not.

*a whispered invocation*

They fall in spite of my lack of boots.  
They fall directly into my mind,  
wrapping my fear in thick gauze

*like a needed medication*

## *A Poem For Winter*

Maybe there will  
be snow gathered by  
the old wooden fence,  
where the field gives  
way to the trees.

Where the birds pause  
before risking the sky.

Black birds flying  
through falling snow,  
appear as white as the  
landscape they left below.

Fading into the grey  
of another winter.

Maybe there will be  
snow lightly gathered  
to remember the way  
our footprints looked  
side by side  
before the storm  
chased us home.

## *Meditation on a Winter Walk*

Skinny game trails wind through briars  
and I follow them to the edge of  
the frozen stream, a perfect  
metaphor for a life frozen in place.  
Still and unmoving to those  
who stand outside looking in.  
Rich and alive to those allowed to  
dive deeper beneath the surface.

I've aged along with these trees,  
though we hate to show our weakness.

Someday I will decay like the fallen limbs.  
If only my body could attract the  
beautiful fungus of the tree bark.  
Become covered in layers of white  
life feeding on a shell of bone.

I feel the heartbreak in the fallen leaves  
where they let go of the certainty of height.  
Harboring life as we await the thaw  
together from the safety of the ground.

I've aged along with these trees,  
feeling the walk up the hill in my lower back.

I've been grateful on a snowy evening  
to call these woods my own.  
Quietly, as we can never really possess  
our little patches of earth, we can just  
call them ours, out of earshot of the trees  
who always hold their own power.

I feel like I'm still awaiting  
the arrival of this winter.

Like it escaped my grasp even  
as the cold freezes my toes  
and the wind blows through  
the empty husks of summer flowers.

I've aged along with these trees,  
but they are the only ones who don't seem to mind.

## *Sub Zero Beginnings*

We've been frozen in place  
by sub zero wind chills.  
No motivation to leave home.  
Not even to gather the ads  
and bills from the mailbox.

We're trapped inside with our  
possessions and personalities.

Beginning to sort and take stock.

As the calendar blocks run out,  
the world tightens a cold fist,  
and I make room for what  
will carry over into the

stinging breath of  
another new year.



Everything is still -  
all life seeks the warmth of home  
in this frozen time.

# *Wounds Unbound*

I can't write today.

There's too much emptiness  
that feels like the arrival  
of a winter prophecy.

When discontent falls  
softly and binds hands  
trying to form words.

I just want to hide

from the walking wounded  
bundling their cuts under  
layers of insulation.

Hiding the places they bleed  
  
across this failed urban experiment.

Moving through the hush of  
visible breath, as loud as war.

I stay in,  
leaving my wounds unbound,  
the silence complete,  
my words frozen over  
the empty page.

## *Infinitesimal Victories*

The blue line of snow is  
moving out across the lake  
leaving behind flurries and  
sideways chimney smoke.

I'm brewing a new pot  
of strong self-doubt.

The winter birds who  
come to the feeder  
help me celebrate  
infinitesimal victories  
even though it's just  
everyday life to them.

Leaving the nest,  
traveling for food,  
claiming the air.

The sky is brightening.  
The pot is ready for milk and sugar.  
The day is ripe for little victories.

## *Winter Knows its Time is Growing Short*

Winter knows its time is growing short,  
yet it holds on, spitting out  
fat, wet snowflakes that coat  
the fresh shoots that have  
bravely risen from their beds.  
Snowflakes that turn to slush  
under the worn out boots  
of people who have grown  
tired of having cold feet.

Winter knows its time is growing short,  
and it roars in protest  
with strong winds that rattle  
the young, tentative buds  
of the still sleepy trees.  
Winds that push the ever present  
grey clouds to continue their assault  
on a new hemisphere, one  
that has grown tired of the heat.

Winer knows its time is growing short,  
defeated by the early morning  
bird song, the yellow of the  
daffodil, the quiet rhythm  
of soft rain falling on the clover.  
Rain that turns to puddles  
for children in shiny new boots  
to play in, their laughter  
signaling the gentle return of spring.

While lambs sleep  
the lions claim the  
cold, gray sky.

## *Spring Clean Up*

Spring clean up,  
when we head out  
and survey the decay  
of the long winter.  
Dried leaves to sweep up,  
branches to burn.  
We try to pretend  
the dying never happened,  
that the leaves never fell,  
that the flowers never  
dried up and dipped  
their heads low to the ground.  
That the grass was never  
covered in a killing frost.  
We pretend the  
dying never happened.  
It's too close to our  
own visions of being  
bagged up, burned, and forgotten.  
We embrace the youth  
of spring, plant flowers,  
fertilize the soil,  
and believe we can  
slow the decay,  
but every minute  
things are growing old.  
And eventually we have to admit,  
so are we.

## *Stuck in April*

I'm stuck in April while  
everyone's chasing summer.

The bare trees reveal the  
plastic shopping bags gripped  
in their limbs, soon to be  
hidden by new growth,  
but stuck just the same.

I've just left blue and green  
floating balloons and piles  
of presents. Mothers with  
babies balanced on hips,  
hip clothes balanced on  
their slim shoulders.

My hips ache with the  
remembered weight while  
my babies roll eyes, grip phones,  
and ask to go home.  
No longer finding joy in colorful cakes.

We're stuck in April,  
chasing summer with the  
too close memory of late winter  
snow on emerging daffodils.

## *Lessons of the Bees*

A swarm of tiny bees  
looking to nest in the  
hollows of my  
plastic wood patio.

Gentle bees  
who will be gone by June.  
Their entire lives  
spanning just a  
few months.

They nest, procreate, and die.

Easy. Uncomplicated.

They don't ponder  
the meaning of life.  
They don't wonder  
if there's more for them out there.  
They don't question  
why they do what they do.

Just nest, procreate, and die.

They don't bother me  
so I leave them  
to their work.

I do wonder if  
there is a lesson  
for me here.  
If there is a  
reason they  
have chosen to nest  
outside my backdoor.



What lies hidden  
beneath tree bark,  
in creek beds,  
in the souls of us?

## *Yard Work*

Clear the mulch from the ground.  
Let the weeds grow where  
before there were only roses.

Buy a flowering bush for  
the corner where the  
apple tree once grew -

to let you know when winter is really over.

Hang up a porch swing, some  
windchimes for the breeze,  
adopt a garden gnome to watch  
over a groundcover of clover -

spend some time searching for a little luck.

Add a squeak to the back gate  
as a reminder of lemonade  
stands and mud pie afternoons.

Draw a hopscotch grid in chalk  
on an otherwise pedestrian sidewalk -

give the dog walkers a reason to play.

## *Embracing Dandelions*

We were so impossibly  
young before, before

before we spent our  
lives fighting weeds,

our hands aging while  
hidden inside bright gloves,  
as we tried to tend  
perfect gardens.

Now I walk into rooms  
and see our familiar  
youth buried under  
new faces, buried  
under years spent  
pulling thistles and clover.

Our eyes creased from the sun,  
our backs sore from the bending.

In these greying days of  
a cultivated life, I realize  
our youth would have  
lasted longer had we  
embraced the dandelions,  
instead of fighting for the roses.

## *Perfect Green Squares*

I sprinkled wildflower seeds in a garden plot,  
years ago in the corner of my lawn,  
to attract butterflies and bees.

Now my lawn is mostly weeds.  
Dandelions and clover that blow  
in on the wind, mock strawberries  
to give a touch of red,  
Queen Anne's Lace slowly  
turning the lawn into fern.

This bothers my neighbor immensely.  
He suggests sprays and powders  
to kill the intruders into his suburban expectations.

We're not supposed to allow  
the weeds to grow.  
We're supposed to cultivate our  
perfect green squares, plant  
bright flowers to dress up  
the middle class mediocrity.

I tell my neighbor that he works to hard.  
It's all green anyway.

He only shakes his head.

He'd rather dig, water, and poison to cultivate an illusion,

than to accept that the wild is  
just as beautiful when  
left to creep in as it may.

# *The Weight of Morning Air*

I like the way the  
morning air has weight  
to give substance to the day.

I like the way trees  
don't believe in fences.

I like the way blackberries  
fall and get crushed under foot,  
staining the sidewalk.

And how they just don't care.

I like the way dark clouds  
decide how the weather will turn  
regardless of my plans for the day.

I like the way nature  
doesn't apologize -

how the weeds never know guilt  
for where they've decided to grow.

There is  
a certain music  
in the rain song  
that reminds  
us all of our fragility  
reminds us how easily  
we break.

# *Sunburnt Throats*

You must walk the place  
you've never walked.

Past the ministry van  
and the curve in the road,  
past the house of boards  
where the flames licked the sky.

Where you're reminded of the  
time you tried to swallow the  
sunlight in bright orange sips.

You will find yourself in a  
place you've never been where  
the earth tilts to question  
your position in space and  
time comes along for the ride.

Find the white butterflies  
who chase the sunburnt throats  
of the damned trying to take  
up as little space as possible.

There you will find gratitude  
for an imperfect place to  
rest your cup and fold your hands.

# *Today Doesn't Need Your Busy Hands*

Today doesn't need your busy hands.  
The wind chimes only ask for an ear,  
the filtered sunlight will accept even tired eyes,  
and the hot tea will slip past your tongue without effort.

Today doesn't need your busy hands.  
So rest them on worn pages,  
let them fall useless into your lap,  
and fold them so they'll not seek movement.

Today doesn't need your busy hands.  
Save them for the coming work  
that always seems to follow  
the idle summer day.





# *Part Three*

## *Sestina in Black*

At night, we stare into the black,  
ponder the position of the stars,  
meditate on matters of faith,  
and compose soaring ballads  
of thanks for our blessings.  
Throwing our worries to the wind.

With the rising of the wind,  
we look deeper into the midnight black,  
and find that those blessings  
are as distant as the light of stars.  
We raise our voice, seeking the ballads  
to redeem our shaky faith.

Through the willingness of faith,  
through the myths on the wind,  
we rewrite these ancient ballads  
to speak to the empty black  
space between the stars  
where we have always sought our blessings.

We aren't supposed to question these blessings,  
are only supposed to take them on faith,  
to believe there is more than emptiness between stars,  
to believe that there is meaning to the wind -  
and to the heart of man so black  
that it sometimes composes murder ballads.

There is a haunting reality to these dark ballads,  
a human abstract not found in blessings,  
a complicated place in the black  
truth of humanity, not found in pure faith.  
Faith is as fleeting as the wind.  
In reality, we are made of the distant stars.

It is to the pure light of these stars  
that we should compose our ballads.  
In the constant of the trade winds  
we should seek our blessings.  
In nature and humanity we should put our faith,  
even when the heart of humanity is sometimes black.

Though our ballads are often black,  
and the wind shakes our faith,  
that we are made of stars is our blessing.

## *The Soul*

The ancient books like to speak of a soul that lives unseen inside of us. It might hide behind your heart. It might be tiny, invisible, or see through like the skin of a jellyfish.

This soul constantly needs feeding.

So we look to the sky beyond, look hard for something to believe in so we can feel we are good and necessary as we use our share of oxygen.

Yet, I've found little in humanity, almost nothing in fact, to convince me it exists. Nothing to justify the bloodshed caused by faith in the soul.

## *From My Window*

From my window  
I watch the cars rush by  
on their way to wherever  
it is cars rush to.

From my window  
I watch the people hurry by  
on their way to wherever  
it is people hurry to.

I sit in the window  
watching the world go by  
without the desire to rush  
and hurry like they do.

Just sit in the window  
watching and wondering  
if they even know why  
they do what they do.

# *Buses for Humanity*

Maybe if we all took buses  
instead of hiding in cars,  
we would see each other.

How we look in  
the early morning,  
still clinging to dreams

How we look after  
another day of  
fighting expectations

How we climb the  
steps tentatively,  
as if thinking there  
is still time to run.

How we sit down  
heavily, when we  
realize there is  
no place to go.

There's a connection  
in breathing the same  
stagnant air, in  
weathering the same  
bumps in the road.

Humanity in waiting  
in the rain for the  
next bus to  
carry us home.

## *Salvation on Consignment*

loose pennies, quarters  
people on the sidewalk  
picking up luck, dropping  
it in the tin plate to  
buy a little salvation  
at the strip mall church

a little forgiveness  
for a multitude of sins

salvation dropped  
from the pockets  
of the rich reaching  
for their phones

their place in heaven  
guaranteed by their  
generous donation

the rest of the sinners  
make weekly payments

salvation on consignment

the pastor pockets  
the profits from  
your original sin

while the righteous  
just keep paying in



Can a society that  
measures time by  
wars achieve peace?

## *No Belief in Resurrection*

Can forgiveness ever be real?  
Can our hearts ever truly heal?  
I've no time for deep reflection -  
No belief in resurrection.

Each heart owns its own special sin.  
Through lies we are all born again.  
A talent for misdirection -  
No belief in resurrection.

There's too little love in this world,  
where hate and war have been unfurled.  
Broken lives of disconnection -  
No belief in resurrection.

My sin sits like a paperweight  
upon my soul, sealing my fate.  
There's no time for genuflection -  
No belief in resurrection.

Look at you on your hands and knees  
repenting to an empty sky  
for your humanness. Shouting pleas.  
Look at you on your hands and knees,  
enslaved, but believing you're free.  
Wearing shame like a mournful sigh.  
Look at you on your hands and knees  
repenting to an empty sky.

## *Where the Woodsmoke Doesn't Reach*

I shall find an empty groveling grove -  
where the woodsmoke doesn't reach,  
where the forest tumbles on forever.  
I shall kneel while blood spills from my knees  
and pine for you beneath the maples.

I shall lie while love leaks from my eyes,  
in the wild brambles of the forest floor, atoning  
for our sin with a million scratches of the skin.

I shall find an empty groveling grove -  
where the woodsmoke doesn't reach,  
where the forest tumbles on forever.  
I shall rise under drops filtered through a thousand leaves,  
wearing my shame like the scent of rainwater.

## *Tell Me, Mary*

But, Mary, my knees are  
    already bloodied.  
My lips are cracked from  
    the dry desert air.  
I've crawled for so many miles  
    to pay my penance.

Now you tell me I don't have to be good.

Mary, do you mean that  
    I can stand?  
That I can rise and clean  
    the sand from my wounds?  
That I can leave this wasteland  
    I've been living in?

Now you tell me it's ok to love.

Mary, there is such comfort  
    in your words.  
You give me the strength to  
    rise from my knees,  
To throw my arms open  
    and take in the sky.  
To cry with wild abandon  
    as the wild geese fly by.

## *The Truth of the Birdsong*

I will listen with you  
to the high wire  
conversation of the birds,  
but there are days when  
I feel unworthy of the birdsong.  
Unworthy of even the sunlight  
flung across our path.  
Unworthy of the nourishment  
of the bite of apple.

While the birds seem to have  
a shared language,  
an easy way of being together,  
I look for ways to escape.  
My internal chatter leading  
me to calm my chaos  
with a hermit's silence.

A simple room with a single bed,  
a scarred desk and pen -  
conversations only with myself.

If it weren't for these walks,  
I'm afraid I would  
miss the truth of the birdsong -

not everything needs a purpose.  
Sometimes to exist is enough.

## *Comfortable Silence*

I find most people  
to be too much.

Too much noise,  
too much movement,  
too much to respond to  
without time to think.

But, I think if we sat  
by an ocean, or in  
a garden surrounded  
by Japanese Maples,  
providing beauty, if not shade,

that the conversation  
could be thoughtful.  
That we could actually sit  
without someone feeling the  
need to clear the plates,  
move the chairs,  
or check their texts.

And if silence descended  
while we gave space to  
our thoughts,

I'm betting it would  
be the comfortable silence  
of old friends who  
have forgotten that they've  
only just met.

## *Whiskey Excavations*

I could use that offered teacup of whiskey.  
An evening to sip and share -  
I would tell you how I also  
sat next to a nursing home bed  
with my grandfather as he lay dying.

I studied his tattoos and listened  
to the sound of the oxygen flowing.

Lately, I've been excavating too  
many layers of memory.  
My life forming in streaks like the  
sedimentary rock you would have  
studied to be a geologist.

Are people like rock?  
If you cut me down the middle  
would there be a strip for each era,  
some rougher than others?

The layers where I was lonely,  
the layers where I was lost.

I've been thinking of you  
stepping out into summer,,  
staring at the sun in a haze of smoke.

I think I can feel it in my lungs.  
Or is it the unspilled words making it  
such an effort to breathe?

I really need that drink and a walk.  
Instead I'm in for another sleepless night.



## *Sitting With Ghosts*

I thought you might understand  
how sometimes the night gets so long,  
how a quiet house can feel so lonely,  
even when you've waited all day to be alone.

I thought you might understand how it feels  
when the wind is blowing relentlessly  
against the windows  
like a thousand ghosts demanding to sit  
with you for the night.

Maybe you'll get that sometimes  
I welcome them,  
but that tonight I don't want to sit with ghosts.  
Do you know how it is to not want to  
sit with the ghosts?

Do you know what it's like to not want to sit  
with the real people you love either?

The people who've heard it all before?  
To have conversations that sound like every  
conversation you've had before?  
That are guided by years of shared memories and  
screw ups and bad days and good days?

Maybe you don't understand what it's like to want  
the freedom to be who you are outside of all that.

Maybe you don't understand any of this at all.

All I can do is hope  
that something is  
getting through.

## *Chasing Glitter*

I've spent so much time chasing beauty,  
capturing sun glitters across still water  
on an afternoon drive across farmland.

I'm feeling too old to continue this pursuit.

.

I'm an afterthought to those  
who claim to claim me. Invisible  
to the trend setters who sell  
exhaustion as a viable dream.

Rebellion comes in the slowing down.  
In no longer chasing the sunlight glitter.

.

You didn't expect to find me in these  
rebellious words written by aging hands.  
You assume nothing but safety can be  
found in slightly sagging skin.

What will shock you more?

If I let the white sprout like weeds  
among the color that remains,  
or if I hide behind the background  
noises of life with a slick box  
of store bought bottled brunette?

.

I didn't aspire to a post as  
guardian of the written word,  
as an aging rebel in a culture war,  
but feel called as a gatekeeper  
against the comfort of mediocrity.

Against the pursuit of easily acquired glitter.

## *I Am the Aging Everywoman*

I never was a dancer,  
now living in an older body,  
still long, lithe, and  
bendable at the knee,  
able to relivé and retiré  
even as youth exits the stage.

I never was a pianist,  
now playing with stiff fingers,  
still finding the rhythm,  
through an unheard metronome,  
able to bring you to tears  
with a sad funeral dirge.

I never was the pretty one,  
now gray wrapping around roots,  
still turning heads with  
grace and soft laugh lines,  
able to look back on a  
life of offered possibility.

I am the aging everywoman  
who never found her way.  
I am the heavy body and  
sagging breast of a life lost  
to opportunity untaken.

I carry unplayed  
songs in my fingertips,  
an unwritten ballet in my feet,  
  
and stories untold in my pen.

## *Bodies in Retreat*

For years I studied people's gums.  
Dissected smiles to see if I could  
detect those getting long in tooth.

To see if other gums seemed to  
be deserting other teeth the way  
mine seemed to be falling back.

I coveted teeth surrounded in  
bountiful tissue. Marveled  
at pleasing pink v's in  
mouths that never knew  
the taste of blood.

My gums are running away.

Getting out before it all goes to hell.

Lately I've been studying people's throats,  
Looking for subtle wrinkles.  
Searching for signs that the skin there  
has decided to start heading south,  
inching away like my gums.

Everything is in retreat,  
abandoning their posts  
in the war against time.

If only I could slip off the day

like a shirt

pull my mistakes over my head  
and add them to the pile

wash them clean for another use

# *I'll Hold Your Pain*

Let me hold your pain for awhile,  
so you can smile.  
Show the wild side  
you thought had died.

My hands are strong enough to hold  
the pain you fold  
into your heart,  
the ugly parts

you're afraid for the world to see.  
Breathe and just be.  
Laugh at the rain.  
I'll hold your pain.

# *The Hand that Saved Me*

I found you lying there,  
unable to lift yourself up.  
I started to reach out,  
but hesitated,

unsure if it was my place to help.

In that hesitation,  
was all of humanity,  
all of our shared despair,  
all of our insecurities.

My hand grasped yours and I pulled,

because I remember the fall  
and the taste of the dirt,  
and the feel of the hand  
that saved me.

# *Pockets of Joy*

Here's the thing -

you will find the world isn't  
the fairy tale you were sold.  
Happy endings more rare than truth.  
Hands that reach out to pull you up  
sometimes slap you down.

Cement and bus fumes,  
pollution and grit.

But, here's the secret -

you hold joy in your pocket,  
and you can spread it.

You can be the missing kindness.  
You can create beauty  
out of concrete and grit -

the way sunsets reflect  
on high rise glass.  
The way the rain washes the  
street clean in little rivers.

You can be the love and the art  
that changes the world -

And that's the most beautiful thing.



# *Invisible Threads*

It's the ones who watch a spider fall  
from the ceiling on an invisible thread  
and dream of repelling off cliffs.

Who see themselves at the end  
of the spider silk and imagine the  
places they could stealthily fall into.

They own the rock faces and witness  
the sunrise at the top of the world, because  
they've found the way down.

It's the ones who watch the fireflies  
blinking in the dark on the 4th of July  
and dream of lighting up the world.

Who see themselves as a glow  
in the night and imagine the  
corners that need their brilliance.

They own their spark and light  
the path, because they found the way  
out of the way things always were.

Watch the spiders.  
Claim the cliffs.  
Watch the fireflies.  
Claim the night.

Change the world.

## *New Light*

Our ancestors  
never had roots.  
They followed the food.

Packing up,  
leaving behind,  
moving on.

Existence built on change.

Then someone planted a seed.  
Then someone tamed a beast.

We stagnated.  
Became resistant to change.  
Began to cling to the stories we told about ourselves.  
Celebrated cages while we clipped our wings.

But, there's a part that remembers.  
There's a part that craves movement.

Don't fear who you could be,  
don't fear seeing the sun  
from a different angle.  
Instead, ask yourself -  
what can be found in this new light?

# *Supernova*

My body is gently slipping  
fading gracefully from dreams  
drifting lightly on sore feet  
that have forgotten the summer sand

Speaking truth through a dry mouth  
that has forgotten the taste of  
blueberries on a heat wave afternoon

I long to believe in the magic  
of sunflowers and saltwater  
In the truth of skin streaked  
with scars that reflect the sunlight

I'm fading gracefully

blinking out

but I'm still a spark of light  
with the power to go full supernova -  
blinding in the beauty of my final act

## *Creation at My Core*

I am the universe.

Galaxies etched in white

across a great expanse of belly and hip,  
the Milky Way spilled in white stripes.

I hold stars in my eyes for all who earn them,  
until they fall with crushing disappointment  
and the beauty of blinding light.

My gravity holds no one close,  
but pulls planets into my circle of white noise,  
my swirling asteroid field before sending them reeling.

I contain all the building blocks of life.

Creation at my core.

I am the point from which hope is born.

Peace in chaos theory.

I breath in, breath out. Contract, expand.

Reaching the edges of the void to  
fill the darkness with new life.

New life born of the stardust of a thousand eons.



## Notes

“Hungry for Words” was originally published as “Write” in the December 2017 issue of [somnia.blue](#)

“January Moon” was featured in episode 9 of the [MJ Poet’s Show](#) podcast

“The Truth of the Birdsong” was originally published in the February 2018 issue of [Peeking Cat Poetry](#)

“Whiskey Excavations” was originally published in the December 2017 issue of [somnia.blue](#)

“Tell Me Mary” is dedicated to Mary Oliver and her poem “[Wild Geese](#)”

“Where the Woodsmoke Doesn’t Reach” was inspired by [CS Hughes](#) and his poem “I Shall Find a Gravelling Place to be Alone”

## *I Dedicate This to You*

I am forever grateful to the community of poets on Instagram. Over years I have been honored to be a part of the support and inspiration that they offer. This book would not have been possible without them. I am especially indebted to Marie Blake (@whiskeyandpens) for her encouragement, friendship, and for taking many a poetic walk with me. A few of the poems in this collection were part of an ongoing conversation we had through poetry. Rest in peace, gentle soul.

*To all of the poets and readers who keep poetry alive - the world needs you more than ever. Keep creating, sharing, and believing in the power of words.*

*thank you for reading this small offering of poetry*

If you would like to read more of my writing, you can find me here:

[By Kelli Anna](#)

This collection was originally self published on Amazon in 2018 as paperback only. I always meant to make a digital version, but instead unpublished it completely because I wanted to write under a pen name and I suppose I had a bit of a crisis of confidence in my writing. I offer it here for free in hopes it can bring just a little quiet joy into someone's day.

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© Cover photo is an original digital painting by the poet's daughter from a photo by the poet.

## *A Beautiful Blurb from a Lost Friend*

“Kelli’s writing is reminiscent of the great troubadour poets of the 60’s; Woody Guthrie, Tim Buckley, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan spring to mind. Her poetry paints tapestries, stories, and social commentaries so rich in colour they hold you spell bound from beginning to end. And while she rarely uses rhyme, her language flows with a lyrical quality that mirrors the music she loves. When she does choose to tame a technical piece, her astounding vocabulary spans the rhythm and/or rhyme so adroitly the words again flow smoothly and naturally (yeah I’m jealous).

Whether meeting in a gallery of her choosing, or across a prophesied apocalyptic wasteland, Kelli’s awareness of social issues and the concerns she feels for the world are reflected with the disarming honesty of a life traveler; her introverted inspection of the world and relationships steals breaths and wings its way unwaveringly true.

She is, in short, a poet and writer of the soul.”

~ Matt Shirley



This offering of quiet poetry seeks to unite through the collective experience of heartbreak, redemption, and living in a modern tapestry that seems to be unraveling one sunset thread at a time.



*"My breath over bone makes you hunger.  
For snow.  
for innocence, for flesh in a craving mouth."*

*- from "Air Over Bone"*

