

Postcards From the Other Side

A Collection of Poetry

By Cheryl J. Eschenfelder



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By Cheryl J. Eschenfelder

*“O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?”*

*From “Among School Children”
By William Butler Yeats*

For my family

Who have always been here for me in spirit and in song

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Foreward

I have a writer friend who is fond of reminding me that all art, and particularly poetry, is an exercise in confession. This is certainly true for me, and I think, if honest, for most poets. We have a tendency to write what we know, where we've been and are and where we'd like to be. We are by nature a pretty dreamy lot, and if not careful, too emotional and too revealing for our audience. So, with the wisdom of Wordsworth to draw from, we usually allow those emotions some amount of time to resolve, mellow and generally fade before we attempt to weave them into verse.

Whether grief, joy, love or general observation (and I would argue that in the world of poetry all these are fairly equivalent), it's important to allow some time to go by and emotions to fade into memories that can be carefully recalled for the reader. The last two years have brought a lot of loss for me, including the death of my precious mother, who raised me and my brother with a gentle spirit and a strong sense of faith – in life, and in us. Her death left a hole that cannot be filled, but the experience of saying goodbye has also brought a unique opportunity – the chance to confess, process my grief and heal through the exercise of writing. Time has gone by. A lot came and went. A lot was discarded. Even more was rewritten again and again, until it was worthy.

What has emerged is a collection unlike anything I have ever written before. It looks to the past for meaning, reflects on the pain (and joy) of the present and reaches for hope in the future – all while asking the simple questions for which there are no answers – what has come before, and what, if anything, comes next? Will we meet again? What will that be like? Grief, and indeed life, are not linear. One day brings peace and acceptance, the next sadness and anger. For that reason, the “chapters” of this collection are not labeled, but simply numbered, as part of a progression through the experience. There is no linear journey to take through these pages, and no real resolution or happy ending. Chaos of thought reigns here, as it does in our everyday lives.

My mum knew the end would be difficult for me, and she prepared me well for the loss. I realized, just in time to fully appreciate the beauty of the experience, that she had been preparing me all my life – in every way reinforcing with me the belief that things are as they should be, that every day has a purpose in our learning, that every moment is to be treasured and appreciated, and that every dream is attainable. My mum believed that the questions we ask reveal more about us than the answers or beliefs we embrace. I have to agree. All of us try to find a place to land, but the act of spreading our wings and flying into the unknown is a leap of faith, and no answer, whether real or imagined, can replace the joy and exhilaration of taking that flight. I cannot pretend to possess the answers to these questions, but I hope my readers will enjoy taking this journey with me and find themselves, as I have, in the questions.

Postcards From the Other Side

The Mockingbird

The bird of a thousand voices
through this long, dark winter of denial
has sung a single, lonely song
outside my window the dawn
has found her plaintive crying
from her nest in the oak hoping
waiting for an answer
from the wind or from her mate.

Waiting long
waiting calm
watching through the leaves
as others finally return
to take their places here
in smaller numbers than before
but, oh, so welcome at my door
wrens working through the straw
in pots or my brown hat hung on the porch
the jay circling the yard
screaming at a squirrel who has laid claim
to the concrete bowl and the cool, clear water within
the rustling of tiny chickadees
talking on the wind
the scratching of a thrasher
the cooing of the doves.

The lonely bird now hears them all
and greets her mate with songs
she knows and mimics well
where all is finally right
her tree a growing symphony
of sound and joy
waking me and holding me
in gentle morning light.

Remember

Whether above or below
remember
lips of gold
and silver clouds
the shape of air
and water deep
the promises we break and keep
the things you dream
sleeping under moonstone skies
amber sighs
sapphire eyes
the silence of fire
and the presence of flame reaching
to each the other

this river tells no lies
in the blink of an eye
we see the world alight
lightning flashes
and sparks shower
over hills of green
and summer flowers
remember the world as we make it
and don't bother with the answers
there are no questions for

remember the sound
of a summer day free
and run against this tide
to the end of a string
remember you and me.

The Well

Here in the desert
where silence purifies the soul
and tears dry into precious gems of light
before they reach the dust
where sand and stone
are separated only by water
and a million years or more
of sun and wind
the truth is born in light
an orb so hot it blinds the unsuspecting
but wisdom rises from the murky darkness
the last vestiges of hope in a cloudless mirage.

And we are treading a gentle path
in softly shifting sands
feet trained for a bottomless well
unmistakably in sight on a blue horizon
where water deeper than the sea
ancient, burnished and pure
rests in an oasis of clearer thoughts
than starlit nights on reddest rocks reveals
where we, like painted figures on rose cave walls,
will swim in cool, dark moonlight
souls quenched by holy wine.

Here these hearts of watered green
hold nothing back and reach for nothing more.
The well is echoing our names.
Open your eyes and rise to greet me.
The dawn of dreams awaits.

On the Roundabout with Harry
(In Memory of Nilsson)

I'm on the roundabout again with you
your sugar frosting voice that plays
through and with my heart
whether getting up or going down
it brings a laugh
a tear
a smile
and runs like pandemonium
a circus roller coaster
or rides upon the tide and lingers
like a moonbeam on softer paths
and clear green dreams
and sometimes you're deranged
but in the best of ways
and through the waves you turn to blue
with skies and eyes that see the flood
and warm the blood
the love you left behind
and gone too soon.

I wonder whether this is just the way it goes, this life,
or whether it's at all the way it seems
and still I know I'll reach for you as I pass by
and know you when I cross the grey
and pray again to hear the music play
on and on like angels on the wing
as long as you have love to give
as long as you've a song to sing.

Alone

Now I know what Harry meant
by aerial pandemonium
one foot on the wire
with no net in sight
and a handful of plates
ten more in the air
and holding my breath
to the shattering sound
of my life crashing by
in this stranger than stranger ballet.

But still there's a place
a moment of peace
a warm bed with clean sheets
or an hour in my chair
the cat in my lap
or a breath in the sun.

Creation eludes me
the birth of a mountain
the arms of a tree
and the mouth of a stream
I feel like Mohammed
my teaspoon in hand
climbing this mountain
one foot to the other
grateful when I find it
for a moment or for a few hours
where I know where I'm going
and what needs getting done.

This is the sound of letting go.
This is the sound of alone.

The Question

The wonder of each connection
of touching and knowing
of feeling someone near
or hearing a voice
or seeing a face in your dreams
in the question:

Does love remember and hold fast forever?
Does it hurl itself onward and retreat
like the rhythm of waves on an endless shore
ever-present, but changing
from blue to green to grey and back again
as the days and skies change above it?

Does it grow like a seed
a scattering of life from the goldenrod pods on the hill
or fly, fully-formed, into the heart like a spear?

Does it settle, as everything must
into a soft, secure place of its making?
Is it fed by the bonds we nurture with children
or mother or brother or friend?
Does it lay itself down in the gateway of dreams
or run to his side as he ponders the past?
Does it last?

They say, in the kingdom of hope there is no winter.

What the mind doesn't know, the heart fills in
memories written and rewritten
on the broad expanse of the sky
until I imagine I read you so well
and you know me in fire bright
or the slow fade of starlight
these sparks in the air
your eyes like two blue embers
Do you burn for love?
Do you burn for me?

Love moves the stars
and cradles the weary
it comforts the child
and erases regret

it weaves the thinnest filament of hope
into threads of fine glass
and washes the breeze
in flowing angel hair
and in the glowing of coals
the light of all lights
when all other fires have gone out.

Anasazi

Canyons deep
and streams of milky ice
ghost white wolf
hunting under cottonwood
five hundred years or more
we stood here in this place
and breathed these red rocks deep
in antelope of gold
and cinnamon terra cotta clay
ground this corn at break of day
and worshipping in gardens of spires
we tossed it to the gods of wind and fire
in house of stone and light.

The ancient ones
these oldest ones
who lay on slabs of stone and charted stars
the souls of those gone by hanging in a silent sky
and stacked these bricks in moon-shaped caves
on cliffs below rocky ledge
in winter's snow we shed our tears
in rainbow soil and painted faces
on these walls and freely roamed this land.

Anasazi dancing stone
circles in the firelight
in the moonlight
under azure clouds and skies of grey
speak to me of days we knew
tell me of the man with blue tattoos
hold this land
hold my hand
while we stand here again
and dream of days gone by
and lie once more with me beneath these stars
and leave our souls warm in this sand.

One Life

If one life was enough
then ten thousand years would tell our tale
through the mist
would shift these days
to reflect the lands we've left behind
a grain of dust on a sunny breeze
would watch us reborn
to love again
to breathe again
beneath these skies
held by this soil
burned in her fire
or drowned in the waters
washed up on these shores
like driftwood and rocked
to the rhythm of feet on these floors
or the shifting of sand in these halls.

And I wonder if we
would then know or remember
this whirling dervish of time
and kaleidoscope patterns of color and light
that draw us and call us
on through the night.

Balloons

Yellow, red and pink
on a sunlit ray they float
on the whisper of wind
in the blue air wafting and washing the sky

held by strands of hemp
hot air hissing and tethered to baskets
woven in reeds and golden blades
or lifted by little candles
dancing paper lanterns
in breeze or pond suspended
in gardens where green waters run
and black rocks tumble against the roots of ancient pines

or waving over the plains
over the Serengeti
over the great grasses of the north
where we have run in gentle wonder
in lovely wonder
of the world we met at dawning
and carried with us to the end of a string
in a park on a summer day.

Waltzing

Life
done in a short turn
of the planets around the sun
Jupiter, Venus and Mars
just a jaunt of three steps
one to the right and the left
and then one back again
through the northern night sky
seduced into believing
the moon in her glory
will smile through the drifting of clouds
on a nearly cloudless night.

It all spins around
again and again
this waltz
this rhythm of heavenly bodies
circling each other
rocking gently in the dark
looking for a touch
palm to palm
a hint of fingers brushing
when hands briefly meet
or an arm encircling
or resting on a shoulder

Round and round we sway
round and round we turn
roaming across the floor of the sky
looking for the light that shines forever
yearning for the flame that lingers on.

Hold Fast

Love simply in the storms
walk gently through the gardens of dreams
and remember love
from days of old
from hours to come
living in each moment
stretching time
by breathing through in every sense.

Feel it all in summer's sunset light
allowing humble truth to mark your steps
along the trail to see the mystic
where you find it
waiting along the road
never paved with gems or gold.

Seek the cold
where warmth rewards the weary
where every path is found
not by those who organize or rule
but through the light of inner soul
of which we are or choose to be.

Remember who you are
of all we ever were or ever will aspire to
holding fast against the world
and reaching out forever more
for the dawn of love divine
of all you know and all you feel
remember I am ever yours
as you are ever mine.

Song for a Solstice Night

Let the sun blind us to the world
and melt us in her lovely, holy gaze
here in this balance
where darkness and light meet ever as equals
and grey havens await
we carry a song of winter nights
and the child inside
awakening from sleep
and opening our eyes
as a new dawn breaks
underlined by days of star's reflection on the sand.

We all fly
some too soon away
all are imprinted with a certain light
the elements of air and sound
that spin in place
and like a whirlwind
carry us through space
like flecks of comet dust
on a greater cosmic winter's wind.

Some listen in the storm
to other voices
other years
that inscribe a place once known again
and so the remembrance begins
the gold and silver that marked once
our hearts and fingers
binding us to seasons past
and to memory of what we were
once upon a time
one life very like another
over and again
until we beg to recall
to take another turn
and remember the echoes on the wind
that take us back
in dream to roads once traveled
in a thousand winter's light
and there laid in heaven's arms.

We call this love

this snowy dream
we are walking through
slow fading starlight
as morning comes on.

Hold on tight.
For as the season changes
from dark to dawn
the journey never ends
and all on this solstice night
is in perfect balance
and ever as it should be
ever as it is for everything
and for all of us
forever more.

This Christmas

If you remember this Christmas
to send me a postcard
or a thought on the wind
don't forget
that the last days of autumn
are not left behind us
that the whiteness of winter
is only a blanket
to hold in the heat

and this blaze in the grate
with my stocking hung there
is waiting for nothing
more than the gift of a smile
the touch of a hand
or the sound of your voice
on the line

that another spring day
lies just 'round this corner
and another summer sun
to be worshipped by lovers
and the spray
from the sand and the foam.

Would that these days
would settle like snow in soft drifts
while we lay ourselves down by this fire.

Would that this Christmas
would just bring you home.

The Grey

Mister Wolf has come to visit me again
he sits on the rise above the house
in early mist and gazes casually
across the meadow
to where I've cleared the gate
as though he owns the grass,
the air, the sky,
and he is in charge of his domain
challenging the law to take him on
or drive him away.

I circle about the grey
the softness of his jaw and chin
and wonder what it would be
to run my fingers through his coat
or feel his nose against my face
he is the wild of wind and thunder
bold of step but traveling lone and lightly
he is not what he appears to be.

Spirit stopping on my hill
making my view his own
and waiting for the time
when I will follow him again
follow him into the grey
into the dawn of dreams
and take my place beside him
to howl once more at the moon.

Morning Dance

You lie beside me early deep
half in dream but not asleep
and I can taste the breath of golden ray
of sun so sweet

A rustling against me
like angel wings
like birds in trees
crossing my threshold
heralding this dawn
I know this grace
know your face
hold my dance
hold my breath
to hold this place
as though the time will take you back
and run from view
to circle round another day.

Dawn, my long companion,
through hours of ice and flame still burning
through the night and air so still and rare,
my truest moment frozen here for just a breath

Hold my hand
Hold this sand
Before it drifts through dunes so deep
and promise me we'll meet again.

Dreams

If dreams are hopes unrealized
the winter has kept us warm
passed our time in blanketed down
and visions of home
where I am found in your heart
and you are lost in my arms.

Like all artists
bound by creative endeavor
to the love that we seek
we pry and ply with this craft
poets at heart
eyes wide open
to the dissonance and perfection of this world.

Singing this duet
like Ira and George
brothers in flesh
but lovers in song
sitting arm to arm
and humming together
to the honking of horns
on gritty New York streets
their symphony in blue.

They say you can tell
when Lennon and McCartney
were writing together
by the layering of voices
and the sound of their music
and I wonder if John,
so in tune with his partner,
ever said, "it sounds like Paul,"
when reviewing his lyric
or smiling, knowing that the secret
was already revealed
and laid bare to anyone
who was really listening.

Lovers and artists
eternally friends
muse to the muse
Brahms and Schumann

Chopin and Sand
or the crafters
once and forever in love
with the craft of their others.

The dream is evolved
from the heart of this hope
the sound of two souls
shoulder to shoulder
in unison or harmony
sharing a room
or a world apart
in creation
in the grey haven gloaming
come again to walk
and dream with me.

Yellow River

China sings to me
in ancient dreams
holds me to her breast
and tumbles me through mountains green
or watered fields of sloshing rain
through forests deep
and rocky ways
that keep the secrets
of ten thousand years
of serenity and strife
of olden gods
and golden bowls

here where we laid
our land against the river wild
and loved with abandon
these days of stones and bones
and simple ways
that call to me
to lose myself within an evening star
or the cranes in the water
the shore beckoning
through the yellow haze
and on to brighter days.

Northern Star

Polaris constant
star of the north
foundational to sky
and earth spinning round
Angel Stern on angel wings
wait with me or call me back
again from the space between the stars

all paths crossing this line to Orion
from stellar roads that never end
beyond lay deep
in ancient dreams
and there remember his face
recall his heart whose light divine
reflects in brightest realms
and leads you on.

Hold and brilliant refine
your place in blackest night
and blaze again for me
on shores beyond
from lands where we again hold fast
and shine for all to see.

Dancing

In how many places have we danced?

Our feet laid down in well-worn paths
on forest floors beneath ancient oaks
or graceful olive trees in groves
and graveyards of green
or laid in waves of waving grass
or on the shore at break of tide

and do these lands remember us
or sing our songs
or hear our souls as we draw near
or feel the warmth we left behind
the flame of hearts on fire
the rich desire to hold it all
in hands of brown or let it go
like streams of sand
that wash between our fingers

the wonder of the sun that stretches
low and long and lingers
calls us back
calls us on
leads us
drives us
waits for us
and finds us in these blades of amber
holding on to sweet September
feeling touching praying
for the chance to sway again
together in this dance.

Message in a Bottle

Ocean glass polished cotton candy pink
and salted blue taffy smooth
and buoys of sea foam green
wound in netting
rocking gently on the watered sand
reflecting darker light
on moonless nights at turn of tide
carry here my message in a bottle
on to shores unseen
where mermaids dance at dawn on beds below

I wrote it on a piece of pirate parchment
lying on my back under shuttered southern skies
and I can feel you here
arms catching me like sunlight in a new net
on Sunday afternoons
where we've been swallowed by the sea
and spray on golden sun-kissed skin
and the salt-sweet taste of you
that lingers on to Saturday

here, the sound of my voice
over these waves
the sound of my song
is a promise that never sleeps
this is love
driven by faith
burning with hope
to send this missive on
in a bottle home to you.

Mariposas

Lie with me under the gathering of stars
in the Oyamel firs of El Rosario
pinpoints of light in the velvet
of galaxies swirling
lie with me under the moon
deep on the warmth of the sod
and the grass folded into a mat
or covered in a blanket of leaves
purple and brown
here on this ground
where butterflies sleep in their wings
or splash in the trees
like fountains of tears
the queens and kings of old
their gold and black cloaks
resting untouched
until the next flight.

House of the Light

The man with the blue tattoos
dances on the wind
through my dreams
like smoke in the haze
and stands
under the watchful gaze
of the sea
lifts his hands
over head
to the house of the light
or the start of the day
and sees
when he looks at me
all the sorrows and joys of my soul

as upturned faces
catch the sound of the rain
on our tongues
catch the sound of the light
with our hands
catch the sound of the night
on our hearts
and dance under this starlight
to hypnotic rhymes
to the rhythm of life
to the pounding of drums
and the pulsing of fire
and limbs of gold
entwined in the grass
and birds rise together
and sing to the dawn
of the blue

and the man in the moon
from his perch high above
with earth in his hand
and sky in his pocket
still moves and still flies
through the dreams I still love
the man with the blue tattoos.

Uvalde

It's not that far to nowhere
a breath and a turn
a smile in the making
or waking on the wind
it's not that far to reclusive
to be found through conventional means
like the meaning of sound
or the nineteen little angels of a South Texas town.

Standing in the breach
the soft of step and slight of sail
of all that came before or through the door
the haze across the vale
the things we wish we'd never seen
the things that might have been
we wake
we fly
we dream in shadows deep
and pray for better days than these.

The Wanderer

(For John)

He follows the path laid before him
forever again and again
and knowing not what to believe
he waits for the world to reveal
what he most needs to know.

Regrets, the constant companions
he refuses to embrace
he chooses instead awareness
choosing to change
content to wander
and knowing not all
who wander are lost.

He is a raindrop of hope
in a winter of storms
a spark in a flame
a dream in the rain.

The Ancients

Are we older than comet dust
the remnants of galaxies burned out
and scattered across the wide tidal wave of the sky
or have we exhausted our welcoming here
and wait for a change in this night?

Are we tangled in these dreams
drifting in a sea of flowers
and holding still only to begin anew
or clinging on to squeeze all we can
from this fruit to taste all its sweetness
and feel all its pain
before we seed here again
and start the search over
to feel the yearning of heart to heart
from life to life
to dance in these rocks
and under these stars
as the ancient ones did
all those eons ago
drawing their fish from the water
and planting their seeds in hard ground
and pulling down the stair to the stars
as they waited
for the Father of Sky
and the Mother of Earth to reveal them.

Don't move from this boat
until you have said you'll remember
the sound of my song
and the curve of my face
until rivers run hoarse
and fish cry out for air
and then cast out your net
so wide and so deep
that you cannot pass me by
and let thousands of years gone dry
wake in our passing by
and lie still in these waters
and wait for our souls' return.

Fairies Dust

Irish ballads on the wind in the thistles purple clouds in the morning on black stones in the caves at Tintagel on the sea long boats and tall ships in the sunlit pink tile roofs on houses of white steps on green hills swaying with goldenrod flowers in the shadows of snow-capped peaks in sunset's red light apples green olives strewn in the grass gold headdresses and temples of stone in the sand under tall trees in the crowded market my sandals clapping on cobbles as I ran through the streets or over damp ground soft through tall grass or the pebbles by the sea salty smell of high smoke rising in the morning to open shutters on glassless windows brushing floors of packed clay roofs of straw carts fashioned from reeds in the river cattails gently waving on hot summer days on the hillside in crystal clear streams of dust from the desert red rocks in the canyons of yellow and gold fresh turned soil for planting and ancient trees under canopies of green silk or white linen clinging to skin brown leather cording and bangles of silver and copper bowls in public baths and gardens cool courtyards and horses in stables in the rain on my back the sloshing of feet in flooded fields of fireflies glowing at the edge of the meadows at twilight the distant clang of large bells or the twinkling of chimes in the surge of music on the evening breeze through paper walls or in stone halls —

these bits of fairies dust that float through my dreams to remind me that we are here for a breath and ever return to the blue — these paths lead me on, and all lead to you.

The Comet's Tail

Stars are raining here tonight
tears of Leonids
fragments and remnants of a comet's tail
that blazed across and lit the blackest blue
millions of eons ago
when we were still the dust of stars
on its way to destinies in darker moons

and here these crumbs of icy light
cry in purple-flooded skies of grey
and dance like fireflies in flight
on the trail to Milky Way.

The old ones in canyons recorded the faces
of their star ancestors here
and rivers rippled their names
under confetti-grained nights
and you stood there with me
your voice in these rocks
as we once held so long ago
your heart burning into mine.

Come November
come to me on this mountain cold
and breathe in this air
and spin through this path of stardust with me
in glitter of gold
while the orbs gently turn and sigh
and your face reflects these sparks from a flame
hear me call out to you in this firelight
and tenderly whisper your name.

The Slow Goodbye

(For Mum)

There are rivers now to cross
crystal streams and deep blue dreams
that linger after skies reflect your setting sun

as if you're letting go
waiting for us to let you go
or waiting to be remembered
by those waiting for you in realms beyond
and plans you've chosen well along the dawn
where work and songs
and those you've held so long
and close in thought can see you come.

Where you can sing and cling
to things that warm the tongue
and tease the senses
all the things that you've remembered
and couldn't live without another taste

this long goodbye that lingers
and the long hello that follows
so I know I'll find you there
however long, however far
I travel with you on my heart
or in my voice
following your postcards on the wing
until all of you becomes
the best of me.

My Mother's Daughter

Like her mother before her:
she embraced kindness, generosity and charity
courage, understanding, forgiveness and humility
she rejected gossip, hatred, intolerance and greed
she never trusted a liar
she consistently practiced fairness.

As my mother, she taught me:
to take a balanced, thoughtful approach to life
to advocate for children and their future
to think for myself
to be responsible for myself
to do no harm
to help
to protect the Earth and all of creation
to keep a clear head in times of crisis.

Like my mother:
I have suffered for love
I still wash behind my ears
I have a quirky sense of humor
I have never shared how I feel or what I believe with more than a handful of people
I am proud of who I am and where I come from
I believe it is a responsibility and an honor to pass on my gifts to those around me.

Like my mother before me,
I am my mother's daughter.

The Space Between the Stars

The turning and returning
of our days through the grey
and through the blue
through the spaces and places
we remember so well
alongside the worlds

where we call
to the other to stay
to wait
before crossing again
from life back to earth
like a tunnel of light
from womb to rebirth

where nameless faces
in silence and stillness
stand at the door
waiting to choose
waiting to know
where the world slips away
where dreams slip away
and where all that remains
is the love we once knew
and held onto again through
the space between the stars.

Life Lessons

Want to learn
take a bite out of the world
the bigger the better
connections in the primary
red, blue and yellow
with no fear of the black
holding to the grey
in distant dark diamonds
holding to the truth
through cold nights on the ground

and let me weep
from the skin inward
cast a wider net
to take in everything
that washes from the bottom
of deep water and settles
in a soul before it turns itself inside out
and reaches up to deport
transport me home
or onto your shore
or to rest against your shoulder.

This World

Love this world with all your best
these fragile times and souls unrest
spirit-hungry, who need so much
and have forgotten who they are
and what they deserve
have forgotten or never learned
that nothing of any value can be bought.

Love these hearts so drenched in pain
who need to know again
that all is well and hope is never lost
that every pathway leads us home
that every soul is valued
that every blade of grass and flower
has a purpose and a place to be
that heaven waits for those who dream
and life is never what it seems

that whether dancing or standing still
fear is the thief that steals the heart
and kindness is a state of being
that beauty reveals itself
in natural unadorned moments of truth.

Love this world and hold it holy
hold it healing
and happily in all it is
and in all we're yet to be.

One Night

And then one night
suddenly you were here
like a morning ray
lighting on my skin
and for a moment I could see
the curve of your face
the brightness of your eyes
that I have known since birth
a warm wild wind of a smile
and in a moment, all was clear.

We are never alone
in love
we are never alone
in silent dreams
or in the darkest corners of this life.

In eternal light we endure
and shine the brighter yet
and come at end of day to see our path
and realize our potential as possible.

Come, tell me all
release your secrets to the wind
and make for us a resting spot
in deeper pools
by a breeze on the ocean
where water's in motion
where in a drop of your tears
lies the heart of the sea.

These Days

Know the future
and feel freely
its long overdue holiness if you will
but live in this moment
in the eternal now
in the life we've been given
moments passing by
that are part of the gift
we've been graced
and will never again come around.

Embrace the winding path
and release the sadness
that filters through the days
like sifting sugar sand.
Hold instead to this rocky shoal
where pebbles dragging gently
in blue green waves
sing softly through the night
as the tide rolls in.

Here, where the wind
through the lilac trees whispers
and the window of magic opens wide
lay down on the breeze
and float through the down of a cloud
reaching high
the mystic and fairy
of ocean and air
and look for me there.

Whirling Dervish

Dancing with purpose
I remember your feet
bound with soft white cotton strips
ribbons padded and pounding these floors
white gowns swirling
keeping the tender flow of rhythm
like the shifting of sands
in these ancient lands

these roads and bridges
that Constantine crafted
and Sophia guarding her walls
her heavenly gates
your arms outstretched
palms open to her golden realms
your head thrown back
heart turned to heaven
turning and whirling
gliding in her divine wisdom
feet sliding and whispering on her jewels
lifting and stomping
in gentle percussion
settling into my soul.

Mesmerizing this hypnosis of sound
and the movement of body and mind
turning
returning
until I can no longer remove
the dancer from the dance
the soft tap-tap
of gauzed toes on the stone
leading me on
leading me home.

The Looking Glass

Through this kaleidoscope
like Alice down the garden hole
to wondrous worlds
and tea in the afternoon
and always late
for gold pocket watches and silver galleons
for purple sails on blue-green waves

for the dawn of day
we lay our hearts
on the queen and king of tides
and water soft
these cards we play
for love
to hold
to stretch
to turn the wheel
and watch the colors shift against our eye

the tumbling glass in cinnamon light
caught in a mirror and reflected
like days in the haze
like days in the sun
these days when we are One.

Believe

Regret nothing
for the universe sets all to right
for those who love

for whom all is for learning
and nothing is mistaken
for all who long for the unknown
the children of the ancient souls
who begin in innocence
and are given to grow

sorrowed by the world
and sometimes lost in grief
but shunning the grievances of the world

who turn until they find their balance
turn their hearts into the fray
and believe again
immersed in childlike wonder
believers to the world as dreamers.

And we are dreamers
dreaming the same Dream
holding to these moments so familiar
once experienced
and weaving all our hopes together
for something true and real.

Time will reveal this love.
And love will reveal it all again
and again
and again...

The Calling

Call for me and I will come
sing low on the morning wind
or in twilight air so cool and clear
where the moon caresses the sea
call with heart open
in sorrow, pain, or joy
throw wide your door
and welcome my step on your stair
lying softly still
enchanted, breathe lightly
give nothing
and reserve thoughts
for everything but sacred wine
on lips parched and waiting
for the deepest drink
in dreams of me.

Island of Light

Do you remember the walls of the square
the green of the grass, the blue of the air
or the throwing of fire from your hands at the bowls
the water, the waves and the flowers of gold?

Or is it a dreamscape and nothing but fancy
that brings me back here
as though this is the beginning
the place of remembering
instead of the roads through the times we surely have suffered.
I wonder.

Tall grass always calls me
and the goldenrod pods on the hillside
the edge of the shoreline and rising of waves
cold water from stone wells and cobblestone stairs
houses and walls crowded together
and bustling markets
and warm fields in the summer.

Do we remember –
or do we tell these stories only to find
and define a place to belong?

All is a dream
or a dream of a dream
a story, a sigh, of hellos and goodbyes
of sorrows and laughter and love on our tongues
our hearts in the breach and our breath on the sun.

The Path

I have wandered this path
through rows of honeysuckle
and ridden through
the crumpled, golden silken sheets
of folded sand
bridging the vale
from gate to ridge
on this little patch of earth
I call my own.

I close my eyes or open them wide
against the rising sun
across the ravine
where all the trees spread wide their boughs
against the green
and catch the water rooted deep below.

This path
where, with ever step I've taken,
I've been lost
in thought of you.

This path
where you have been content
to stand with me,
serene in dreams.

Once, when we were young
your heart was open wide
and all lay bare
to sky and air
and grasses waved in fields of gold
and the stories we told
in the others' arms
of heroes and heavens and lovers of old
while the stars sang in tune to our song.

The path winds and bends
the innocence ends
and everything changes in the light of new day.

The cloak I once gave you
the woolen and plaid

to warm your fair skin
and cover your face in the rain
the ring you once wore
the boy and the man
return with the dawn
clear-sighted and more
in the greenest of days
in the old childhood ways.

Take hold of my hands
and lay down your questions again.
I'll tell you my stories and secrets in time.

And there, where the path finds the ridge
we'll build a new place
with garden and gate
we'll pull down a stair to the sun
we'll dance through these meadows and sing to the moon
and as children, but wiser and stronger,
come home.

Debussy

When I was 21 and Claude and I were still
the closest of friends
and every moment was a prelude
to savor hands at the bar
wending and winding
though sunken cathedrals rising in mist
from dancers' sails and veils
with the wind on the meadow
where perfume swirled in evening air
and ballades were sung
by the sea in spring
and maidens with linen hair and eyes of blue
welcomed new lovers under moonlight
drifting through footsteps in the snow

and fingers danced
in days of gentle rêverie
soul stirring and soaring
there in tender twilight finally
I remembered you.

Blueberry Days

The gorgeous, glorious days of us
soaking in the summer sun
under strawberry skies
the dawn of faith
the dawn of dreams
beyond the golden flat

kaleidoscope of light
you my constant star
my true north
voice to my voice
heart to mine you lie
and hold to me through
the forces that save us
and the things we're still too young to know

laying on the moon
across the paths of fireflies
these blueberry days
in which we plan
and softly land
your hand within my hand.

Caravanserai

Set this sun for me
this blue and yellow dawn
red orb still settled just below the sand
and rivulets of wind-swept waves
rising gently in a dusty haze

my golden castanets on wrists and ankles
keeping their rocking steady rhythm
to whisper shuffle steps in folding sand
camel silks and silk on limbs
tied with heavy ribbon red
like sun-burnt skin

bare feet skimming
pounding ancient floors
in this dizzying dazzling dance
swirling veils and streaming hair
face upturned in serene seduction
hands to fingers leading
summoning
to depths of raw desire
and you drawing
recalling my face
and glimpses of mouth and eyes
on mind and soul.

Pull down this moon for me
and pronounce me the sun to your stars
your constant
and hold me to your heart in desert nights
and on to welcome rest in caravanserai.

Just in Time

I love the way you find me
wherever I might be
the way I find
just in time
your crooked smile smiling back at me
your hands, your heart
your thoughts that carry on the wind
I love the depth
and breath of you against my skin.

You come to love a soul
with no regard for baser things.
Where do you live or work,
who do you love?
The answer is “the universe,”
for once you hold a spirit close
the power of creation opens wide the door
and sends more souls to know
and seeds to grow.

Just in time you find me
or perhaps the find is mine.
What does it really matter?

Your voice is with me everywhere
and I know that you can hear me there
in moments blue and days of green
in breezes free
in clouds and trees
and lazy days on quiet lanes
in birds that sing
and streams that flow
in moonlight's glow
and wherever I might find you
I have and will
never let you go.

Road to Damascus

The desert often calls my name
the shifting sands
the sands of time
of Persian or Ottoman Empires
her silks and silver silence
stretching for miles and miles.

Thousands of years of war and strife
of birth and laughter
echoing on sandstone walls.

I saw once the swimmers' cave
the place where sand met shore
where a lake or seaside retreat
had drawn the bold to dip in healing waters
to plunge its depths and stretch their limbs
to feel the trickle of wetness
and cool against brown skin.

And I've been thrown in deep water
and I feel I have joined their ranks
like Peter or Paul
searching for the light
in a place that never sleeps
where only the darkness cools this healing flame
swimming hard against the stones
the sand wet with tears
reaching for the surface
and gasping against the barrier
that separates us all from the air above
and the darkness below.

Is there a dream that hasn't been battered
choked in hot sand or drowned in the sun?

Is there a hope that survives
or are we all eventually driven to our knees
parched and dry
deserted by all that has ever forsaken the lonely
and left to swim –
slowly and painfully through sand –
on our lonely road to Damascus.

Looking for Van Gogh

I have come to the place where master and maverick
rebel and rule-breaker hang side by side.
Frame after frame of flowers and faces
portraits of screamers and gardens of green
bridges and sunsets, fragments and chaos
blocks, lines and circles
layers and layers of paint poured on canvas
or rows of soup cans.

Past Pollack and Chagall
through halls lined with Rothko
the dots of Seurat and the dancers from Paris
I'm ignoring my friend Andy Warhol today.

I'm hunting instead for fresh hay in the meadow
and sunflowers golden.
I'm hoping for peace in a world soaked in anger
the lovely, the gentle, the swirls of a night sky
and the calm of a room in the eye of a storm.
I'm searching for something that can't be defined.

I'm looking for love
that leads us and bleeds us
drier than dust
and gives us reason to live
to believe
to rest in the arms of the heavens
and converse with our better angels
Love –
that stretches our hearts to include a stranger
to defend the oppressed
to pity the wicked
and make a warm bed for the needy
to know as he knew
and tried to express
that when all hope is gone and the pathway is lost
love still goes on and on.

Walls

When ancient walls appear in my dreams
rising from tide or waves of green
rolling grass like sunken cities
of white steps on the hillside
and towers of grey cutting
through periwinkle skies
I remember your eyes
of watered blue
and your hands leading me
over fissures in the rocks
and the songs that the seabirds sing
as we rise to the glory of the yellowtail dawn
and cattails at water's edge
our secret spaces you and I
knowing and wearing each other so well
like golden skin shimmering in the sun
and how we have run
through time
under the sun-shards of glass
in kaleidoscope days
and over those cobblestone paths
your laughter echoing down narrow streets
from whitewashed stone
until these walls sink behind the waves
and mist rises thick
deep and blue
and blocks the light
and all I can see
all I can remember
is you.

Lost

I remember places that I have never been
and things that I have never done
and faces I have never known sometimes haunt my dreams,
and I imagine these visions originate in loss.

I lose my keys, misplace my phone, and I lose my temper more often than I ought – as though I'm lost at all, as though anyone can see it's not the same as the quiet that fills the house when someone goes, the reciprocity of being given a soul to hold – to love – as though the universe is paying you back for every good thing you've ever done, as though she is yours, and given to you, but she is not a car, a hat, a home. She doesn't belong to you. She never did. She is only deposited in your sphere for a time until she finds a new purpose and flies away.

And I feel lost, stretched like a little blanket over a too-big bed, and wondering when everyone will stop saying, "I'm sorry for your loss" and "she's in a better place." As though this makes it easier to understand. As though she could be better off without me there. As though I could be anywhere at all but by her side, or do without her laugh, her smile, the things that burn with joy and pain at remembering again.

Perhaps this is the task.
Perhaps the joy of finding cannot be fully known without this.

Sacred Spaces

I will always come back to the place where innocence lies
where dreams are borne on wings of light
these sacred stones and desert nights
lush green grass and perfumed skies
and spaces in between the stars
between the worlds, ancient and gone,
that occupy and are occupied by you and I

And I will ever wonder how many places we have known
the jewels on floors of domes enclosed
enhanced by heaven's powers
naked feet in sand dunes soft
how many places
how many faces
have we seen and known in each the other
brother, friend or lover.

How many lives
how many mountains high
climbed or shuttered in the rain
to live, to die to come again.

And I will ever come back to all the places we first met
first met again or will again
or will as we have done before
once lay in moonlight soft or burned in baking sun
or danced in olive groves or stood against the wind
or sighed in gentle streams.

And I will always know your face of brown or red or white
your hands your voice and all you see and feel and know I will return
as I have always done
to all I am
to all I love
your heart on my heart
and your dreams on my tongue.

Kites

The tallest tree in the corner of the garden
is leasing out space this spring
to a pair of kites, and I wonder
if Mister Pine is aware
that they are preparing to open a nursery
to grow a few more.

Their nest has a view
and a strong foundation
with roots tapping deep
and a good connection
to air and sky
and an abundant food supply nearby.

We stand on this shore
looking for the sun
long and low on the horizon
rising slowly and deliberately
over the deep blue expanse of the sea
and release the strings of our kites
a fragment of parchment message
tied to their tails
and we smile as the red, green and yellow
of paper and frames rise gently
swaying arm in arm on the breeze
in a familiar dance.

Letting go
floating high
out of sight
in the dawn that has found us
fingers entwined
as two hearts take flight.

On A Clear Day

Lie on your back under a soft clouded sky
and peer through the lens of multi-colored light
until you can see the days gone and past,
and look for me there
in the cotton candy whispers that form like a face
or a tree or a pebbled stream of white.

Let the clouds strange swirling
carry you 'round
to the gold and the silver
the sea or the river
tall grass and the goldenrod pods on the hill
the quiet still of a wide starry night
or forward to witness the orb in the east
the days cloaked in green
the meadows and streams
where we will sit close
and catch what is left
of the world in our pockets
and sing to the dawn
and sleep in the arms of the moon.

Let it be soon.

The Deep

We lay in tall grass
when we were new
clouds for gazing
unfolding in blue haze or grey
meadows below – while heaven sighed

these golden fields in purple light
grain and rain that spins to dew
as Earth gently held us
quivering on her axis
to the rhythm of the stars
circling her center in
a never-ending sway
and trembling in your arms
as gravity gave way

Would that life was warmer
and our years, our days, a flutter in time
that could be lived – then
bargained once again for more

Say you'll sing me now to sleep
and rock me gently in the deep.

About the Author



Cheryl J. Eschenfelder (not shown above) is a faculty member in the Department of Mass Communication at Sam Houston State University, where she teaches courses in desktop publishing, news editing, and features and news reporting. She holds B.A and M.A. degrees from Sam Houston State University, where she studied creative writing with the late Dr. Paul Ruffin. She has worked as a news and features reporter, editor, designer and public relations specialist in East Texas and the Gulf Coast and has published, edited and contributed numerous news and features stories and creative writing pieces to news agencies, academic journals and radio news outlets. This is her second full-length collection of poetry.