

A top-down photograph of a collection of diverse objects scattered on a white, textured surface. The objects include several smooth, rounded stones in various colors (grey, tan, red, blue), two vibrant red autumn leaves, several US coins (quarters and pennies), a few dried insects (beetles and a fly), a small wooden object with horizontal grain, a black pen, and various other small, unidentifiable items. The lighting is bright, casting soft shadows.

# Bones of the Earth

Charlotte Miller



*Every dream comes  
with wings*

*For the generations—*

*Mabel and Lelland  
Nettie and Ray*

*Ruth and Veylerd Ray Elaine*

*Edward*

*Jim and Karen Susan*

*Cory and Christine*

*—the wings*

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# ***Bones of the Earth***

## **Bones of the Earth**

Come close and we will speak  
Of your shiny rock.  
Bring me the stones chosen from all the others,  
Those chosen for their shine,  
Those Earth rumbled into glistening life.  
See light with your  
Child eyes.

Put stones into my hand,  
Warmed by the body of you.  
Bring the stones of your life to me.  
We will save them in crevices,  
Where they will be covered by snow,  
Where they will be washed by the rain.

Hold in your hand the stones of time.  
Let me hear hope in your voice,  
Banish worry from mine.  
Hold your stones up to flash in the sun.  
Let me know the stones given you,  
Will be cherished.

## **Grandson**

Taking your hand in mine, I rub my thumb  
Over your knuckles,  
Feeling small bones.  
You in my lap, there were no other chairs.  
I smooth your dress shirt over your back,  
Finding shoulder blades,  
The lovely channel of your neck.  
I pull your lengthening frame  
Closer to mine, rest my chin  
Upon your shoulder and find your ear with my face,  
My nose.  
I rub the downy cheek and you giggle  
Softly.  
If I blew gently down your neck you would squirm away.

We are in an audience, at a performance.  
You listen.  
I think of your wisdom, increasing  
As you count, name letters for me, how  
You run the silly flopping head of the six, your feet  
Too big, laughing as you turn to dare chase  
.  
You will run away, and I cannot chase.  
I am  
Your audience.  
Let my holding you now  
Last a lifetime.

## **Red-Tail Hawk**

One thing about the blue truck,  
Visibility,  
Over all others in the road.  
Through the cracked windshield,  
Skewing the view,

A bird,  
Not moving his wings,  
Perhaps setting the tiny bones  
Of each side, he rising, circling  
Slowly into so blue autumn sky,  
Lifting above  
Lights, motors, radio whining,

My thoughts  
On failure that day, the betrayal  
Of a friend, then you  
Bird, you living in the evening sky,  
Fine spirit bird,  
I see there, climbing  
Air currents effortlessly, then  
Clarity  
Enters my mind



## **Wood Stove**

Let the fluted handle reveal holed circles.  
Blow ashes from silver coals,  
No warmth there.

All the shoveled back blackness  
Held over from night,  
Grieves this morning's dim light.

Let hands rest on the blue black steel  
Driving cold to the bones.  
No voices call from other rooms,  
No oatmeal, no coffee.

Seek the woodpile, Grandmother.  
Build some  
Comfort, sit down before the  
Stove's warmth, then  
Face this.  
Look directly at the  
Flickering light.

## Prayer Beads

Remember stringing beads, amber or jet  
 On dental floss, pretending,  
 Saying Hail Marys like Aunt Elaine did?  
 Oh worship God tiny fingers  
 Sliding off the threaded globes.

Look here. See those leafless trees,  
 Used, empty bird nests in each  
 Craggy intersection? Who will move in  
 This spring, so far above the cat, see  
 Black tracery of limb before  
 Pink sunrise.

Beneath those trees run children,  
 Holding hands, calling  
 Names at her in the yellow feather hat.  
*Old lady with the yellow chicken head.*  
 She shakes a finger, forgetting,

Robin eggs are bluer  
 Than any color, beads are smoother  
 Than any stone, children will take another's  
 Hand and run, run out  
 Of all that black fractured sky,  
 Of all the tired trees,  
 Of all the strength that fails.

## **Sharon's Death**

Jerking sleep initials the coming grief,  
The letters are not of this language.

Oil glistens on a sun burnt fish, Mount Fuji  
Black lacquered on the silken sheaf.

No footsteps are heard, no call, instead  
From the weeping room, a lily.

An interrupted voice, his smile collapses  
At her liquid, lightless eyes.

Vomiting does not matter, neither does blood,  
Silence only has salt.

Spreading his fingers widely apart, he  
Views the silvered calligraphy.

This is the sound of the etched ivory clicking,  
Silence folding her wings.

## ***Colors***

## **Colors**

Shucking peas,  
I will try remembering this  
To be saved  
For another summer meal:  
Hard green globes,  
Tender circles that break  
Hemispherically.  
Tongue finds the bud  
Of tomorrow's seed.

See the trees there?  
Blue on the blue, in time  
Green grass will grow  
Upon my ribs.  
I'll value my green earths.

Call me overcome and you would be right.  
My hands cannot be patted to sleep.  
Stroke my cheek,  
As I have always asked.  
I will watch, wondering

**Where you were.**

## Ode to an Addiction

There it is, the rectangular package,  
Lift the slim cellophane slip and tear,  
Gently, oh so slowly, around the upper edge.  
As it falls, fluttering, to the floor, begin  
Tearing the second silvery layer,  
Reveal white cellulose circles.  
Tapping gently, urge one cylinder from the package,  
Lifting it up, take it between  
Fingers, smoothing the satiny paper, the aroma rises,  
Breathe deeply that sweet richness.

Carefully place the smooth white tube onto the edge  
Of lips, open the cardboard book, expose  
Small paper stems topped with heads of red,  
Twist one loose, hold it between finger and thumb,  
Draw it sharply along the rough edge  
Snapping it to sudden burst of flame.  
Hold flame steady, guard and guide to  
There, just touch the end, watch the sudden red glow,  
Pull breath through softly, exhale.

Remove the cylinder. Admire its length, smoothness.  
Hold it between second and third finger,  
Remember the touch.  
See the gray curl of smoke? Place it between  
Moist lips. Touch tongue to its center,  
Breathe in mouth and nostril, pull the point  
To hot glow, deep deep breath, closing eyes,  
Taste the acrid bitterness in lungs, in mouth.  
Burn the whole length, burn it all, burn.

## **Bare Knees**

*For Ray*

We watched the thermometer fall  
In slow motion to shatter  
On the kitchen's black and yellow linoleum floor.  
Kneeling, we gathered,  
Tiny globes to meet,  
When nudged, to merge,  
Into larger balls, until one gleaming sphere  
Reflected our distended faces.  
We pushed the globule,  
With toothpicks, both of us.  
Tongues pressed to our lips in concentration,  
Easing the gathering over the hump  
Into an old aspirin bottle.  
Triumphant, we sat back on our heels.  
Rolling the quicksilver around  
And around.  
God said He would catch every tear  
And count them.  
Whose tears were those?  
god-like  
We would catch and reassemble  
Every silver orb,  
Take turns shaking them apart,  
Twisting the bottle,  
Rolling them together.  
Those were some heavy tears.

## Lost Purse

The green brick wall is hot tonight,  
Radiating defiance at the bluing clouds  
In the dusk sky, frothy with rain possibilities.  
I think of the air, enveloping, soft,  
Moving against my skin,  
Wonder if fish think of water touch,  
this comfort of surround.

Across the street a blue light flickers,  
A small television set,  
Someone is watching in a camper  
Parked in the lot there, this July evening.  
Perhaps no parking fees,  
All accoutrements within, a home on wheels  
Never dreamed by Gypsies.

At the Depot, guitar music, colored lights hang  
Loosely grouped outside. I feel smug  
About the small downtown.  
Cafes, antiques and paint chipped windows above,  
Sculpture on corners, trees, yardlets of flowers  
Tended by city workers on tricycle trucks.  
I walk to the classroom, unlock the room  
I hope contains my purse.  
It is where I left it,  
Sprawled like a half empty wine flask.

We drive to the Sonic with our windows down,  
Summer night slides by my face,  
Years of summer nights,  
Driving up and down the one main street town.  
I talk to Ed of this, we order limeade,  
Watch the girls skate the orders out,  
Sit together in the comfort of the surround.



### **Three is More Than a Tricycle**

MacBeth's witches cast three spells,  
Three wise men sought the child,  
Children gain three names at birth.

Et Cetera, abbreviated; early easy  
Words,  
Fun, cat, mom

Gives three cookies, watch Huey, Dewey, Louie,  
Graduate to Larry, Curley, and Moe, SOS  
Dot dot dot, dash dash dash, dot dot dot, God

Is three letters, good words joy, hum,  
Play tic tac toe, three strikes you're out,  
Three outs an inning, triage

Saves a life, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.  
Triangle calls the hands for supper, prime  
Sum of one and two, common palindromes,

Three coins in the fountain, knock  
Three times on the ceiling if you want me,  
Colors of the flag, telephone prefixes, area codes.

Tricorn hat of Paul Revere,  
Work horse wheelbarrow, third call on  
Rock, scissors, paper, Olympic medals.

Triumph begins with tri, traffic  
Lights: stop, wait, go.  
Three squares a day.

Earth, moon, sun, wishing  
Three wishes, waltzing,  
Slow.

## **Columbine High School**

Just fifty miles away.  
I didn't tell ninth hour what was happening  
to kids like them  
just fifty miles away, I thought,  
purposefully, that if I did,  
they would react, erupt even  
with questions I  
couldn't answer  
then  
after they left I turned on the television,  
one scene of a mom holding her daughter  
alive.

I turned it off,  
drove home  
searched stations,  
voices to explain what was happening  
not fifty miles away, wondered  
was this the anniversary of the bombing in Oklahoma City,  
no, today was the 20th, I wrote April 20th on the board  
just this morning, thinking  
what is it about the 20th  
I should remember, someone's  
birthday  
then  
I turned to,  
then, the day happened, news began at lunch  
in the teacher's lounge  
no-one talked, reluctant, waiting.

I kept thinking  
 about Dad, who wanted me to be  
 a teacher, not a nurse, because nursing was  
 too hard, this pay steady, how  
 when I started teaching in 1962, how no-one

ever dreamed it could be a place  
 where children, teachers could be in danger  
 then  
 on the way home I kept looking for  
 commentators to tell me what had happened--  
 give me reasons, explain those children being shot  
 my God, with shotguns  
 in their school here  
 just fifty miles away,  
 here people said all day, it could  
 happen anywhere, even here, but most it's  
 fear of a world where children cannot be safe, where  
 anger, vengeance, bitterness...

at home  
 then  
 I walk out to see the just blossoming Hopi crabapple  
 tree,  
 the unfurling tulips  
 touch, then  
 past scenes of schools riddled, no, not schools,  
 children and teachers torn  
 by bullets from guns shot by children repeat,  
 like the gun, repeat, the sophomore said  
 on the radio, we heard  
 automatic weapons firing, we ran,  
 he recognized the sound--  
 then  
 I think what would I do in my classroom,  
 lock the door, tell the kids  
 get under the desks,

like we did in the 50's,  
duck and cover for safety from the atomic bomb,  
we talked about that today in teacher team meeting,  
others laughed at the absurdity, we did  
believe that would save us,  
watch for the flash

the white flash of light, know  
then  
duck, hold hands over your neck,  
curl into a ball,  
curl the fetal position,  
we would have been found  
incinerated in the position  
then  
these children,  
fifty miles away,  
it is too real,  
then,  
steps we will surely take at our school  
to prepare for the awful, then  
new warnings we must give our classes

then  
how will tomorrow be  
they will ask,  
why  
did it happen  
how do I answer  
what no-one can answer,  
explain grief,  
sorrow at such hatred,  
this question, this teacher,  
has no answer.

## **Summer Dreams**

### **A Pantoum**

I am trying to get up from a vinyl chair,  
Wearing shorts on a July afternoon.  
Fixing you with my vacant stare,  
Peeling both skin and sensation.

Wearing shorts on a July afternoon,  
My bare legs, bare hopes  
Peeling both skin and sensation,  
You said, if it is ok with you,

My bare legs, bare hopes  
I will go into town, get a bus ticket.  
You said if it is ok with you.  
I will call when I find my own way.

I will go into town, get a bus ticket,  
Whenever I get there  
I will call when I find my own way.  
Wherever that is, I think.

Whenever I get there,  
The screen door hushes shut,  
Whenever that is, I think,  
You never fixed that door.

The screen door hushes shut,  
Red rectangles of chair print--  
You never fixed that door  
The backs of my legs

Sting in the July heat,  
I am trying to get up from a vinyl chair,  
Like I had just been slapped,  
Fixing you with my vacant stare.

## Stick Man

The forgotten line  
I had just last week  
Dances around the ice of my brain  
Locked in a foggy vapor there,  
About a man  
Father perhaps,  
Had power,  
Felt it growing  
Into such a piece.  
It will not return to me.  
Do a memory trick.  
Construct a stick man,  
A balloon head,  
No eyes, none necessary,  
Arms, legs, fingers, dexterity required.  
Talk to the little man, give him  
A small paper, pencil, say  
Go, find what I am looking for,  
The moment once had,  
Go find, fetch that idea.  
Send this little man walking up  
The imaginary path, watch  
Him walk slowly up and over a hill,  
Trudging along, peering carefully, first left,  
Then right, never back where I am watching,  
No hips, bony arms and legs, puffballs of feet walk  
Up the hill, let him walk slowly over the edge,  
Over the verge,  
Over the corner of my mind, in my memory  
He is rummaging.  
I wait for his return,  
Bearing a piece of paper  
On which is written that line  
I had for the poem  
I never wrote.

***For The Land***

## **For The Land**

Alone each night, he walks  
From the barn, machine shed, or shop,  
Leaving the silent tractor  
In the field.

His meals are simple,  
Bread meat potatoes.  
At times the wife of the hired man  
Brings him hot apple pies.

He eats on the oil-clothed table,  
Mail stacked against the wall.  
He has wrapped his mother's silver,  
Put it away.

The calendar above him  
January of one year  
Yellowing his seasons.  
Sun reaches that window  
Over the old stone sink.  
Spring again.

He moves to the old rocker  
On the porch at dusk, listens to  
Night come, then  
Lifts his body slowly, a  
Shuffling shadow,  
Pushes one leg upstairs,  
One bare wooden tread  
At a time.



## **That Place**

I.

If I could, I would walk through,  
 Touch the stippled walls,  
 Look out the dining room bay window at the neighbor's  
 summer corn  
 Growing beside Chinese elms,  
 The ground rumbled by old roots.  
 Walk to the porch, sit on the concrete step, look north  
 to distant blue  
 Glimmer of lake,  
 Feel the cool concrete against my legs,  
 Listen to cattle murmuring in the corrals,  
 The clang of gates shutting out back,  
 Children working the calves.

In the kitchen  
 Watch fall's shaft of light slide across the floor, then  
 To the family room, see snow blow across the barn eave.  
 If I have time I shall go upstairs,  
 Thanking God as I always did for a day  
 Once more in that place.  
 Knowing the days were numbered to  
 Our bedrooms and pause before each door,  
 The yellow curtains, the white Priscillas, the blue sheers  
 At our west windows, to touch the  
 Enameled corner woodwork, toe the lined wooden floor,  
 Hear the voices  
 Of ours, of ours,  
 Finding understanding in  
 Those days.

## II.

They walked side by side ignoring  
Impending tomorrows.  
Ignoring reality. Instead  
Lying silently, side by side,  
Awaking nestled as spoons,  
Wind blowing the curtains  
Sweet time to get ready,  
Time to begin packing the days,  
Time to go,  
Time to pull on the boots, gather sunburn.  
Time to feel muscles tired from work,  
Tired from hoping beyond.

Disappointment settled  
In eddies of further days. New days,  
New lives. A tiny hand  
Takes mine and asks to go to our home.  
Another home, not the place we wanted  
So desperately  
We would have done anything  
Within our human power  
To keep—that place.

## Red

Good, the rain from the west washed the white  
 Bird splat from my window.  
 Good, I find an acceptable station on FM,  
 One that is not buzzing.  
 Good, Sunday dinner simmers in the oven,  
 Smells of garlic and rice vinegar.  
 Good, the hills beyond grow green, the trees below  
 My window bud.  
 A boy plays below with his golden retriever,  
 His red jacket, the red dog flash color.  
 Do they play?  
 Is the dog attacking?  
 I study them, boy chases dog, dog waves his  
 Plume of a tail,  
 Barks, down on forelegs, laughing his dog laugh,  
 Boy claps, laughing.

Good God, good.

Jimmy carried Sugar on his shoulders, draped  
 Around his neck,  
 White cat comfortable there,  
 Riding the red three wheeler to chores,  
 His soft voice, her soft whiskers tickling  
 His ears and cheek.

## Silo Road

There was a thunderstorm.  
 Late evening heads of white making way  
 To rain, rain, hail,  
 Wind stinging cold, we huddled  
 Under your jacket in the back of the hay filled wagon.  
 Others watched us, curious at your new love.  
 I was frightened at the dark gypsy girl  
 Who had run to you when we arrived.

A tall gray silo marked the graveled road  
 Now running with rivulets.  
 Your brother drove the tractor, chugging up the hill,  
 We go in streaming  
 Hair and noise, your mother asking if I want dry shoes,  
 Gasping at the size of my feet.  
 I felt large in the small farmhouse,  
 Warmed myself before the propane heater.

You would love me, despite your beautiful cousin,  
 Your silent family.  
 In the only bathroom I would bathe alone,  
 Dry with towels that were so thin,  
 Crisp from having dried in the sun, so clean the sunrise  
 Inside your eyes when you looked at the land.

Tonight I drove the same road,  
 Now covered with asphalt.  
 You said *turn, go past where the farmhouse was.*  
*Stop there on the side of the road, see, they've left that*  
*All in a pile,*  
*I'll see if I can find some boards to use,*  
*I want to make a shed for a Nativity.*

You wrenched rusty nails from silvered planks  
 Weathered by the years between time.

I asked *what was here, there's the silo.*  
You looked at me, swept your arm through air,  
*This was the feed lot,*  
Bend back to your work.  
I turn west to the mountains,  
The evening  
Highway a whizzing race of traffic.

I watch as you pull old boards from a  
Balled up heap of metal and rust.  
What you build could mean nothing to our children,  
Perhaps a smiling  
Regret to your brothers, sisters.  
The kochia weed grows tall and green,  
This infant ball of tumbleweed.  
Wind will blow it this fall  
Into the looming houses on the farmland hills.

## **A Man had A Wife**

A man had a wife  
who had never lived in the country.  
He knew she would not understand  
for some time  
unless he could find  
a way to show her.

He wakes her one clear morning before dawn,  
moon glowing a pathway, he uses  
no headlights, drives them into the fields,  
bumping through damp earth smells  
into the warm August morning.

She looks over to see his hand holding  
a white kitchen towel,  
he asks her to tie it around her eyes, and she does,  
smelling the summer sun  
in its soft folds.

He stops,  
walks around to her door,  
helps her out, then kneels to remove her shoes.  
She senses her body, her lips,  
air cool on her back and legs as he leads her  
into the night.

He murmurs words to her, stand here and listen.  
It will be dawn,  
I will not be far away from you, stand here, listen,  
when you must,  
take the blindfold off.

Her feet on warm soft earth,  
she turns her head birdlike into the silence,  
hears a faraway dog barking, some small rustle of  
leaves,  
waiting then, the slow sense of light  
beneath her closed eyes,  
she knows dawn is beginning.

She holds herself still, loving him fiercely,  
tucks her chin to hear more exactly  
sun rising, birds begin dawn calls,  
a slight breeze stirs her dark hair,  
warmth on her back, sun.

She hears a memory of a full taffeta skirt,  
shushing and rustling and whispering,  
sun warm, sounds full,  
she pulls the blindfold from her eyes.

Blinks as light dazzles her,  
looks up to giant sunflower heads  
golden platters turn to the rising sun.  
She reaches up,  
lifts her hands to cup  
the flowering sun.

# ***Generations***



## **Generations**

Two women are going through a blanket box,  
Looking for photograph albums,  
Finding black leaves holding  
Gray portraits, here

On the high plains,  
Two boys sit at the Platte River's edge,  
Eating watermelon grown by their father,  
Squinting into the sun.  
Mouths grinning,  
That moment  
The river is muddy.

Arms are held away from their bodies,  
Finely made and small,  
So juice can drip  
Over bare feet.  
Spit black seeds,  
With neighbors so scarce  
Anyone becomes a cousin.

## About Buttons

In the oak rocker that sits in my bedroom,  
Once,  
Great-Grandma Ritchie sat  
Before the windows  
In my Grandmother's dining room.  
Visiting that summer, she  
Gathered all the buttons saved  
Over all the years.

As she rocked, she sorted  
Tiny green tulips,  
Old uniform buttons, white daisy buttons,  
Black jet buttons, homely  
Two and four holed shirt buttons, pearly pink hearts,  
One large amber button with a faded gold edge.

With needle and thread she looped them  
Formed a loosely boned family of circles,  
Gently clicking and sliding together on a string,  
Nestled all the buttons in a blue crackled tin.

I think  
About the hands that cut them  
From pink wool cape,  
Or eyelet Easter dress,  
Dad's church shirt, the collar  
Already turned once.  
From daughter's button up the back  
Pink party dress,  
Or gray herringbone winter coat.

Cut from cloth other's hands have smoothed,  
Pulled around shoulders, held  
Close to feel the beating heart beneath.

Great Grandma Ritchie,  
Grandma Baker,  
Who cut with tiny silver scissors,  
Who gathered loops of thread,  
Gone now, leaving only my hands  
To close the blue tin box  
Once more.

## **Myrtle C. Dinsmore Price**

Myrtle Price was 90 today, and herself.  
Enough to roll her eyes at us  
When her daughters hauled her off  
For pictures.  
Does she think of each day?  
Or go on as we do, accomplishing work  
That must be done.  
Those  
We love and do not.

Killing the buffalo and skinning the carcass,  
Cleaning blood and flesh from the hide  
Needed to keep our  
Monuments, ant homes, caves, malls.  
Build rituals for birth, death,  
Sober,  
Truth on wooden crosses.  
Bless books,  
Invent self-control for 2 a.m.  
Name others to take what we wish we could.  
Then look, startle  
At the white face moon.

## **The Deaths of Two Women**

Second cousin Grace  
Died the spring of her senior year.  
Sent out to gather in the cows,  
Her horse stumbled, threw her, broke her neck.  
First cousin Lois, at the funeral,  
Comforted me.  
She lost her own daughter three years later  
To leukemia.  
I'm a cousin that lived.

Ila looked like bark  
Having laid in the sun for two days  
Dead.  
Manic depressive, who knows what happened to her  
In the middle of a pasture  
In the middle of Wyoming  
Along with a bottle of lithium.

The preacher said at her funeral,  
Such a death should cause us  
To re-examine our own lives.  
I wanted to  
Re-examine hers.  
We buried her on top  
A windy mountain with  
A view we said  
Stretched to eternity.

**Usere Leute**  
**Immigrants Upraised**

From a photograph seen in the Loveland, Colorado  
 Museum and Gallery

You know you are pretty, it's in the way  
 You hold your head,  
 Your eyes  
 Agree with the smile on your mouth.  
 Your long dress is blue  
 Beneath the white apron.  
 Hair combed behind your ears  
 From a narrow center part.  
 You hold a sugar beet, a long  
 Wicked knife.  
 Proud,  
 Farm daughter.

Mother beside, surely, her full lips the same.  
 Eyes blacker, no lights dance there, her body is thick.  
 The part of her hair is wide and white after  
 Years of brushing it out of the way, holding  
 Her sugar beet, her knife.  
 Hands loose, small sister stands  
 By the wagon.  
 Long curls, a short dress, a smaller apron,  
 Will be prettier.  
 Brother is behind holding a  
 Handful of reins on a stocky black horse, over  
 A way behind two more horses and a digger  
 Your father's face.  
 It is also your face.  
 He looks boldly at the camera with your lifted chin,  
 Understands how this moment  
 Will last.

## Composition

Pickup truck traveling too fast  
Across the bridge, the trailer weaving,  
The van full of family following,  
We before,  
We watching, as in all moments,  
In slow motion the blue van,  
in the rear view window in the side mirror  
Tipping slowly onto its flat nose we  
Just in front  
Just having passed  
Just having escaped in time.  
Van wheeling through the ditch,  
Dirt showers those behind  
Truck sliding through the roadside flat  
Van tumbling into our just past,  
Sedan racing ahead to the nearest farmhouse  
We move in  
The bubble.  
Seeking the last note  
The composer wafts sound  
Through our song sense,  
Stops just short  
Which we, obligingly,  
Finish in our mind.

## Good Words

Born of the depression, dustbowl times was hard,  
 Grandma saved cream pennies in a chipped china cup,  
 Sent her boy to Sterling to hear John Phillip Sousa.  
 Men sold windfall apples on the city corner,  
 Days darkened at noon, clouds loomed in the west,  
 Women stuffed rags into every small place,  
 Wind blew topsoil through every little crack.

Rhyming words were invented, humor sought  
 To ease the pain,  
 Men's thumbs in overalls, women's heads together,  
 Catching up news on a Saturday night.  
 Jake's old mother died, least she suffers no more.  
 Looks like Ben'll lose the farm, better'n his family.  
 Little John wrecked the truck, glad it weren't him.  
 Hear Harry's getting a divorce,  
 Blessing they had no kids.  
 Milk cow died, yup, least she was close by the gate.  
 Sam married Clara, glad they didn't ruin two families.  
 Guy next place over, tornado took the house,  
 Still got machinery.  
 My wells gone dry, good thing harvests in,  
 Got time to dig.  
 Told the wife the crops is hailed,  
 Got time to fix up the place,  
 Sure to be good pheasant hunting this fall.  
 Mom said to Sadie just today,  
 "If you're gonna break a dish,  
 Make sure it's a dirty one."  
 Nothings so bad but what it could be worse,  
 From birth 'til the day you ride in the hearse.



## Communion

She said she was awakened by music  
when I asked her  
if she heard the birds  
in the locust trees,  
she tilted  
her blonde head to listen.

He wants to play a card game  
tries to stack the deck,  
asks why we can't make up  
our own rules.

The envelope of your life opens,  
for your children you pray good days.  
I hold my wishes more than wishes,  
stop, hold the time I held you,  
the still memory flashes into  
yesterday.

Don't want to play this card, he says  
don't want to clean my room, she says,  
don't want to move on, I think  
don't want to step up to tomorrow  
stay this moment.

The atmosphere rests  
on my arms, the dog wants  
to go for a walk,  
the air conditioner drips water,  
the colorless communion wine  
of the desert.

## **In the Moon of the Black Cherry**

Tatanka Hasha was the chief of the tribe massacred by U.S. troops at Summit Springs near Atwood, Colorado, near Sterling, Colorado, near a dirt ravined hill.

A cement and stone monument is planted on the rolling sandhills of sage and grass, beside it a sheer plinth of rock to honor the fifteen year old nameless boy who stampeded his tribe's horses through the camp so his people could run to safety. The spear of granite stands there to honor him beside the brass plaque placed *in the moon of the black cherry*.

Leland Baker bought the farm in the sandhills a few miles away in 1920 for \$10,000 and sent for his wife and children to come on the immigrant train from lush black-earth Iowa. Come to this sea of hills, brown and gray to blue and green, to cut the sod and stand looking to the afternoon sun feeling the hot wind blow her skirts and tendrils of hair that reminded her of herself as she tucked it back neatly and thought of the work that must always be done and the plow cutting the sandy ground into bleeding ribbons giving up years of accumulation of moisture seeded to short stands of corn prayed over, grow please.

Tatanka Hasha did not grow corn here, only Leland Baker tried...Charley Robertson, Lee Kimler, Chick Tunnison, Fred Davis, others. Build a store, a school, a church, came in horse or wagon to be with others who grew poor corn, raised narrow hogs, peckish chickens and splendid watermelon.

Veylerd Baker, Leland's third living son, comes here sometimes. Family comes too, walks over the foundations of houses long gone, startling grasshoppers, climbs through fences that govern the land once given to plow, now returned to grazing cattle.

Tatanka Hasha had over 400 horses and mules that day. The army took them.

Leland Baker had one pony and car, a touring car the boys drove to school even in winter, the car pulled by the horse through drifts to the road. They were fourteen and nine then, rode down miles of country blizzarding to school.

Leland Baker sold the farm in 1932 for \$500 and moved to town to run a grocery store.

Veylerd Baker learned to fly in his fifties and flew his older brother over where they had lived, his turn to drive.

Tatanka Hasha lost his life. His tribe of fortyfour or so people lost theirs, man woman child to dog soldiers who wanted his land for their people

Fifty years later, their people struggled to cause the land to become Iowa.

The monument stands beside a graveled road. Some days people come to read the words. Smooth rocks have fallen from the cement of the pillar to clutter the ground. The wind blows.

In October of 1864, the soldiers of Kit Carson begin the long walk, the Hweeldi, for the Navajo people, driving them to a reservation in New Mexico, Bosque Redondo. Cutting their orchards of peach trees and killing the livestock, they leave the land desolate. Some of the Navajo, the Dine' or "the people" take refuge on a 25 acre rock summit, make camp on a thrusting fin of a rock, 700 feet above Canyon De Chelly. Carrying two 80 foot pine logs to use as ladders, and using gouged sequences of steps made centuries before by the Anasazi, 300 people climb to the top. After several fruitless efforts to capture the Dine', a group of soldiers are left to stand guard at the base of the cliff to await the surrender. In February, the Dine' run out of water.  
 "Smithsonian" December 1997, David Roberts

## **The People**

I.

One cold night in February, 1865  
 a woman speaks, Grandfather,  
 the potholes are dry, our children...  
 Tsaille Creek runs below at the base of the north cliff,  
 the soldiers camp on the south,  
 the river licks her  
 wet mouth against sandstone behind them and we,  
 must find a way to water.  
 Over the edge we see glow of their campfire,  
 water lapping the base of our world, many steps  
 above those who wait to take our way of life.

If we go back, they will kill us.  
 They chopped down all the peach trees,  
 thousands of peach trees our fathers and mothers  
 planted.

We came here bringing our dried peaches and meat,  
our pinon nuts,  
our corn, our beans,  
our children up the long pole carried over miles  
of desert,  
placed at the cliff so all  
could climb to stay,  
until they leave, stay our lives,  
stay our people,  
the Dine'.

All we need, she speaks softly, is water to us,  
grandfather,  
a way to get water to us, the potholes are empty,  
there is no snow,  
no rain, the water pots dry, children are dying,  
the river is life, the river is below,  
we must dip the water pots  
to the river, bring the water to us.

II.  
She and the women weave leaves of the yucca,  
plaiting fiber into rope  
while men at the cliff edge plan the way  
down the cliff face.  
It will take many  
handing pots of water  
the full face of the wind rippled rock.

Night comes, rope beneath the arms of many,  
they walk to their descent,  
the woman holds her silent child,  
grandfather holds her shoulder.

Only the whisper of moccasin on gravel, one by one,  
they place their bodies down the cliff,  
handing the rope,  
Pots on to the next,  
on to the last man,  
standing on a narrow ledge above the creek.  
Two sentries sleep  
beside the campfire.

He lowers a pot hand over hand,  
feels the pot sink,  
grow heavy, gathers the rope,  
lifts the pot over his head to the man above him,  
ties on an empty pot, lowers it to fill.  
Above him, men lift pots  
brimming with river water.  
Through the long night,  
no pot is ever dropped,  
no stone clatters loose,  
no water is spilled,  
no sound is made,  
no man falls,  
silent stars dance,  
the Dine'  
are  
the people.

***Fisherman***

## **Fisherman**

Trout leap,  
Sun slips,  
Darkening the lake.  
Canoe and fisherman, he

Stitching line through  
Silver silk, he  
Reels in, casts out, glistening  
Beads wrap  
The rod, the boat,  
The water.

Moon unrolls a pathway,  
Canoe and fisherman,  
Glide  
Sharp black silhouette,  
Across  
The satiny,  
Glass skin.



## **There Are These Hands**

You are right. I never did write a poem about you,  
Specifically.

The words I have written are  
You.

They are my hands, the blue veins  
running stitches by tendons,  
No longer milky smooth,  
Knuckles becoming larger from gripping life,  
The ring I wear white gold against the blue.

You want to hear about love.  
This is.

You want the bottom line,  
Cut through the other stuff,  
Cut to the bone.

You are my bone, my breath, my pulse.  
Your being cannot be gone from me,  
Cannot be left from my everyday doing.

I want to tell you this more than anything  
I have ever said to you.

These hands that have held you,  
Have reached for you in the night,  
Have known your soul's breath—  
Become my breath.

Shall you want flowers,  
That kind of poetry, of musically pretty patterns?  
I cannot say it.  
I cannot tell you surface when you are depth.  
I will return to my hands.  
There are these hands.

## **Song**

I wish I could draw your hands,  
Black upon white threaded paper,  
Smudging reality to understanding,  
The picture would change  
Over time.

I wish I could sing, just open my lips,  
Crushed smoke  
Would come lull you.

I wish I could rest  
My hands upon ivory keys,  
Wait until the moment to play melody  
That would weave forever  
Into your bones.

I wish I could dance,  
Turn into the light of your gaze,  
Extend my fingertips to touch your mouth,  
Spin away to leap  
Long legged onto boards worn smooth  
By my feet.

I wish I could walk through you,  
Rest, a trembling bird  
Inside your soul  
Listen to you breathe,  
See your day through your eyes,  
Silent there,  
Until I knew you more than  
I know anyone,  
Anyone, anyone.

## **I Bought Pistachios At The Roadside Stand**

### **A Sestina**

I bought pistachios at the roadside stand.  
The clerk weighed the bag and asked of me,  
Is he a seven-dollar kind of man?

They are priced by the pound and not the bag,  
The sign on that box is misleading, see?  
I bought pistachios at the roadside stand.

She waits as I consider the cost, and then  
Turns her head to watch him walk to me.  
Is he a seven-dollar kind of man?

My thoughts tumble, her question unplanned.  
The first instinct is to whisper quietly,  
I will buy pistachios at the roadside stand.

You see, he is my husband, lifelong mate,  
We've been years together and I know that he  
Is a seven-dollar kind of man.

The moments at night when he takes my hand  
Grant me knowledge of a marriage well spent.  
I bought pistachios at the roadside stand  
For Ed, a seven dollar kind of man.

## ***Rules***

## Rules

Look up words when there is time.  
Wait until the end of a discussion, sum up.  
Put things in logical places,  
(All work in the blue notebook)  
Look obsessively for all work in all the files.  
Discover the blue notebook when finished.  
Remember I forget.

Resent those who interrupt  
When the muse is in.  
Stay calm.  
Wait until tomorrow, it may be better.  
Tomorrows grow fewer.

Realize the old man looking me over,  
Is looking at an older woman.  
Rest absolutely.  
Watch others walk away.  
Let them.  
Sympathize.  
Wish I had someone who would rub my feet.  
Procrastinate in an orderly fashion.  
Write on Sunday.

Accumulate nothing useless to me,  
Resist double negatives.  
Value comeuppances.  
Appreciate leanness of possessions,  
Repetitive chores,  
Weeds.

## **After All These Years**

Invited to spend the night  
In the country, with a classmate,  
We are eight or nine.  
Her father at the table  
In bib overalls sipping coffee, her mother  
At the stove, they are talking.

It is not night yet,  
Sun is at the windows on the west,  
Paned and low in the wall.  
I see violets on the windowsill,  
Thick leaves bristle, then  
Above a glow as sun slides  
Over crimson, glowing beads.  
A bracelet placed on the narrow shelf  
Just at my eye's level.

I reach for the mass of ruby light.  
It is wrong; it is lovely.  
Holding it in my hand,  
Turning it over  
The color changes as it moves,  
Shimmers on my pale palm.  
Breathing softly, I sigh, wish,  
Succumb, slip it in my pocket.  
One pocket still heavy  
After all these years.

**one truth**

my name is not who I am,  
it is my mother saying  
when she had made me  
of Veylerd and Ruth.

it is too many letters to fit  
onto the locket chain,  
it is white grapes, white daisies,  
tasteful crystal vases.

it is joined at the hip souling  
with tall red-headed Barbara,  
sophomore sights of adulthood, walking  
the large gentle dog.

it's grandmother (one name after)  
whispering from the hospital bed  
my name once pink and gold,  
now silver and black.

it is promised seasons  
on a tumultuous rocky beach  
become manila file numbers on lemon parchment  
successive suppressed sorrows.

it became thee from the altar  
after the gather of words  
after wood smoke and coffee  
after all the gathering of name.

it changes again at birthing  
typed onto the slippery bracelet,  
saved in the yellowing book.

it will be sipped as dark tea, scarlet  
sumac in fall, once green--  
walked easy  
through long descending hallways  
of sown sound.

Charlotte Miller





Charlotte Miller is a wife, daughter, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, friend, poet and a life long teacher.

She has read her work to many, published in the Dry Creek Review, and taken innumerable poetry classes.

She loves people and the wonders God allows her to see in her life.

