



When

I was

a child

“Go to your bosom: Knock there,  
and ask your heart what it doth know.”

~William Shakespeare

PRINTER BOWLER

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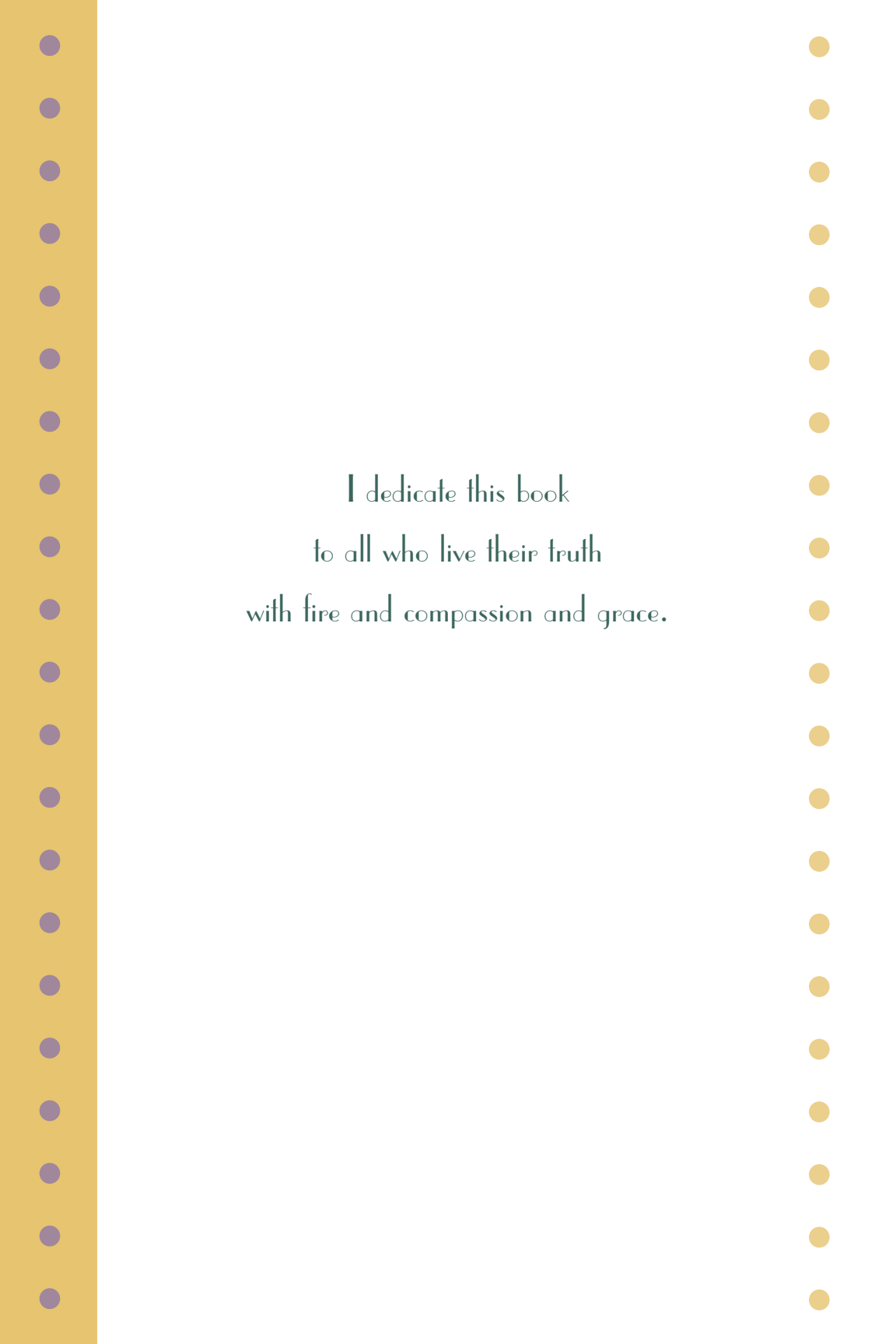
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Many poems in this recollection  
have appeared in my book  
*Spirit of Montana*  
and other publications

published by  
[journals@montana.com](mailto:journals@montana.com)



When I was a child



I dedicate this book  
to all who live their truth  
with fire and compassion and grace.



THIS IS ALIVE

Come with me now  
deep into the letters  
of these words

down between their borders  
through sparkling violet  
clouds of molecules

deeper still into vast  
galaxies of glowing atoms pulsing  
. . . bursting with a billion suns

into the midnight sky.

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# Montana Weather

Time . . . and Times Again



Time...

## GRANDFOLKS

My ancestors are  
the snowflakes, wind  
and stars, the singing  
pines, eagle talons  
and vistas supreme.

My home is where I am  
and I am everywhere  
in this moment free,

no place to go,  
or come to

but in my dreams.

## MEDICINE MAN

Great blazing cosmos  
dances through the last  
glowing embers,  
streaking deep into  
the cool starlit night.  
Young warrior stalks fire  
at the Old One's feet.

Yes, it is true, little hunter.  
You *are* the enlightened one,  
pristine as sunrise sparkling  
through a drop of dew.

All you must do  
is act like it.

## NATIVE

*(for landlords past and present)*

Where were you, when the space  
ships landed near Titicaca . . .  
still floating through the meadows  
in Great Spirit's heart?

The One who owns this mud.

Dogs pace in circles, marking real  
estate. Plotted, they lie down  
to sleep. Barking and wagging  
tails vanish into the void.

What do you, when the wheels  
grind across your heart . . .  
hold up your broken chalice for  
more whiskey, or grandparents' light?

We who will harvest every seed.

Eagle feathers lie scattered in the bush  
amid blood and bones. Free now, their  
mystery soars again through a mother's  
warm breast, renewing leases with the sun.

Who are you, so alone, you think,  
behind some flesh-toned fence?  
Such visions are for herds who know  
not. Cast them off into the flames!

You, O Lords of Wind and Water.

Starlight calls on every camp fire:  
Rainbow child, come home to your diamond  
mind. Take all these bloodstained hands  
in yours, and lead us to nativity.

## GOOD SHEPHERD

*(for the Cide Family:  
Herbi, Pesti & ol' Geno)*

Yes, God only knows  
there lurk on this planet  
coyotes, snakes, hawks  
gopher holes, brambles,  
  
deep ditches, torrents of  
hail stones hammering  
indiscriminately, barren ground  
where buffalo grass once stood  
in serenity flowing,  
  
biting flies, and  
the plans of humankind.

But all those little sheep  
really need is  
a good shepherd.

## PROSPECTOR'S DREAM

*(musing on a dung beetle in his pan)*

All my life I've wondered,  
Sometimes even learned.  
Some promises yet I have not kept,  
Some stones remain unturned.

I've tried to bring home all my dreams  
With great and lofty plans . . . but  
They always end with just plain me  
And fire in my hands.

Seems all I have to offer  
Is what pans out to be true,  
And as I sift it through myself  
I know just what I'll do . . .

Like you there, little scarab,  
(Your folks from Egypt, I am told)  
With no more than my daily crumbs  
I'll build a world of gold.

## NATIVES ONE & ALL

(for John "Sun Talker" Prater)

Listen, listen, beat the drums, pray,  
kiss the joy as it flies and count  
our coup on the otherwise.

As worlds tumble on into the sod,  
we dance and chant our history:

*\*I Am food for everything,  
and everything is food for Me.*

We carry on till nothing is left  
to carry, no fragments of heart  
or mind. Just the burden of light . . .  
Shout Hoka-hey, Great Sun!  
Sacred visions engulf the night.

\*From Wilbur Wood's poem, "Mind"



## I, THE SKY

I Am here, I Am there,  
I Am everywhere  
the twinkle in your eye.  
Not little me, you see,  
But I, the Sky . . .

# ...and Times Again

NIRVANA 22

Someday, I'll be home,  
a voice somewhere within him says . . .

while he knows he must be here  
to get there.





## MORNING SHAVE

So many times I've told you!  
What it is, and where and how.  
I'd thought you'd learned by now.  
Her and him, grace and jim,  
They come and go, are and aren't.  
Did it matter . . . were they where?  
Someone said and someone did.  
Lots of times I went and hid.  
Gazing through this lather, busy,  
Thinking how nice it was  
before I started thinking.



## JACK OF ALL

*(for Jack Gilbert)*

Looking out upon these things.  
This day is tasteless without the savor  
I bring. Coming now with fire,  
transfixing. Circling lower,  
tearing into it, raking it  
into my guts . . .  
till I am everything again.



## COMMUNICATIONS

The spirit among the words,  
the thoughts, often seems  
to reunite its selves in us  
by some act of communion.

Before that becomes necessary,  
before it sounds out of its infinite  
shimmering silence, you can almost  
hear it sigh:

In love you'll always find me,  
I keep telling you, my heart.

## JUST US KIDS

Cave scrawls to terabytes, w'up?  
Little occupation breeds endless  
preoccupation bounces a rattling  
syncopation all the flipped out days  
of our flopped up lives. Rain  
splash fills up the low,  
flows from parking lots  
to the streets tracking down  
ground zero wherever that is

at the time. We're out  
here somewhere shuffling  
in the slosh, tying our shoes,  
tweeting our chatter, looking  
around, dodging da Man.  
Waiting for a lift, a next thing.  
The never-ending, give-it-to-me-now,  
driving-me-wacky, get-me-outta-  
here-so-I-can-be-somewhere-  
else next thing.

## COMING 'ROUND THE MOUNTAIN

She comes again, my mother,  
blowing hard across the plains,  
only now she's got a shotgun  
and a real long list of names:

Enough's enough—she's snortin' now,  
her eyes ablazing red,  
just like the drippings from her womb  
and the thorns that rake her head—

You stole my little babies  
and threw them into war,  
you butchered and deceived 'em  
just like you've done before;

I told you time and times again  
and now that time is here,  
your hidin's done, it won't be fun  
when I nail your eyeballs to the mirror.

My children can't see you at all,  
but I can plain as day,  
an' my shells are full of what you've done—  
blow you through the Milky Way.

Oh, she's coming 'round the mountain,  
Lordy, look out, here she comes!

## SPIRIT OF MONTANA

I'm so sick of beer-drinkin' heartslop  
twanging, yer-the-reason-I'm-shitfaced songs.  
Co-Dep Boogie Compost Pile Blues Yuk-o.  
If I were there I'd rifle a Spud Lite bottle  
deep into the juke box guts. I'd . . . .  
But I'm not. I just can't go there anymore.  
I gorged for awhile, but I'm through trying  
to get high on anything I can run out of.

*\*Remember when you were a little boy,  
prairie winds ablowin' in your ear?*

Dreams . . . crackle of ozone rips my  
breath away, snaps my spine erect, pops  
my eyes bulging from their sockets.  
From deep caverns of the earth spirits,  
tornados come roaring up through my guts,  
toppling proud glacial ridges that tumble  
down into the valley floor and melt among  
fields of barley, cherries, rosehips and pine . . .  
I remember the old man once told me,  
"When she comes, lad, she'll tear you  
from your bones." Slowly I evaporate  
again and the mountains catch me passing by.  
I am Weeping Woman Falls, tears of joy splashing  
down the rocky cliffs, so serenely this time  
around. My watery chimes spray crystals  
of peace into the peach and lavender sunset.  
So it is, the history of my native land.

*Kicking rocks down those old gravel roads,  
while the meadowlarks made it all so crystal clear . . . .*

2:34 am — Distant fire sirens rear into my slumber.

2:35 am — Neighbor Bob is out in the driveway  
firing up his Chevy 4X4.

2:35.2 am — He's jacking out onto the street now,  
throaty rumble of twin pipes quickly fades away.  
He can't wait to help someone out. He just can't.  
"That was so quick. Thank you . . ." is my last

wisp of thought as I fall back to sleep. We mow  
an extra row or two into each other's lawn.  
Don't talk that much, with words anyway.

*Are you starting to get the big picture now,  
finding out how awesome you really are?*

Streets are packed with spotless Expeditions,  
Denalis and Land Cruisers that'll never ride a rut,  
full of rouge-laden Olay'd ladies wearing long  
earrings, occasional white poodles in their laps,  
lightly furrowed brows browsing for vision bites  
in knick-knack shops among the puke-pungent  
potpourris and silk-screened eagles.

"Darling, come here. I have sweet somethings  
for your ear. I know well what you're doing.  
You say you're looking for a heartbeat.  
But are you ready for your world to end?"

*You see, everything's got your name on it,  
all the worms . . . and all the stars.*

Not far from town the river meanders  
around a bend into the lake. I walk there  
barefoot across the cool silty beach, down  
the north shoreline past signs that say  
'Restricted Area — Wildlife Refuge.' I keep  
walking because I am wildlife, too.  
The energy quickly shifts as I move  
into the forbidden world. Air becomes  
tingling slippery tiny light bubbles, suddenly  
still as if someone had just closed the door.  
Fish fragrances wafting off the lake report  
on distant oceans. Thickly sweet aroma  
of sticky poplar buds makes my mouth  
wet with gratitude. Old bones of driftwood  
silently inquire about my soul, and as I  
rest on them we speak also of theirs.

*. . . this something you could not see,  
something you wanted to be.  
It was all in your dreams way back then . . .  
Look out, 'cause they're coming around again.*

\* from *Coming Around Again*, music and lyrics by author.



# Karmic Classes





ABSOLUTELY GOURMET

Who I thought I was  
Headlong into the unknown  
Eating me alive

## A TABLE NEAR THE WINDOW, PLEASE

Nature nets our daemons and prepares for us  
the day's catch. Hmm . . . perhaps they were  
more succulent when young. Back  
in the kitchen, she prays with our angels  
for the day we stop treating her like a bottomless  
dumpster, or an orphan queen to be ravaged  
as we please.

Ah, here she is now, bidding us to come  
take our places.

## THE ONLY WAY OUT IS IN

I can see you bumping your head  
on the onionskin ceiling of adrenaline  
enchantment. Over your shoulder, as if  
from a mountain top, the relentless  
legions of instinct forever grapple and  
writhe in and out of themselves.  
You've been climbing with me,  
with all of us, so long it seems.

Now the membrane hums and begins  
to give. Up out of the water of the mind,  
we probe at wisdom's gate. Often pecking  
our way through one molecule at a time,  
it seems. We've mastered and lost  
this world . . . to itself.

"There will always be wars,  
and rumors of wars," he said.  
It's the nature of the fluid, we nodded,

laughing, inhaling them all as we dove  
deep into the molten core where day  
and night make love without end.

## MOTHER EARTH IS MY LOVER

*[Río Caliente, México 1969]*

Your steaming, milky hands  
worked deep into my bones,  
into my seeding ground where  
no one had touched me before.  
Río Caliente, gateway to my lover's  
womb, cascading swift and gentle  
up from the cauldron of her soul . . .

You've known all along that time  
is nothing, the past a graveyard  
for victims, the future for vain imaginings.  
Now, now you keep rushing, swirling  
into the freshness of each moment,  
living the freedom so many fear and refuse,  
eternally renewing your virginity  
as my essence still pours  
into your ageless night.

As I plunged beneath your passionate folds  
our molten salts embraced and we melted  
together in tenderness and joy. I fainted  
into your caress as you swept me away  
tumbling into the starlight.

*[Big Fork, Montana 1992]*

It seemed like lifetimes since I'd held you.  
My visions became hard and fearful, full of  
sullen strangers, glazed faces, shivering rains.  
But you kept pulling my eyes beyond them

. . . back to the children, to the morning dew  
and earthworms, wild roses and the ravens.  
You kept calling me to hold you again  
as always you have, so faithful and true,  
so pregnant with all of us. Yes,

there are no others. You embody them all  
for me, and as I hold each hand I remember  
it is yours. As I feel the warm softness  
of a nurturing breast, and inhale the mysteries  
of your woods and waters, feel the prairie  
winds massage your soul into my cells, look  
into each eye for that glow of recognition,  
pass a ripe apricot from one mouth  
into the other . . . I know it's you beneath  
these covers, simply asking for my heart.

I'll love and protect you till pain and death  
disappear, till we evaporate into the light.  
At last . . . my vows have meaning,  
are worth something again.

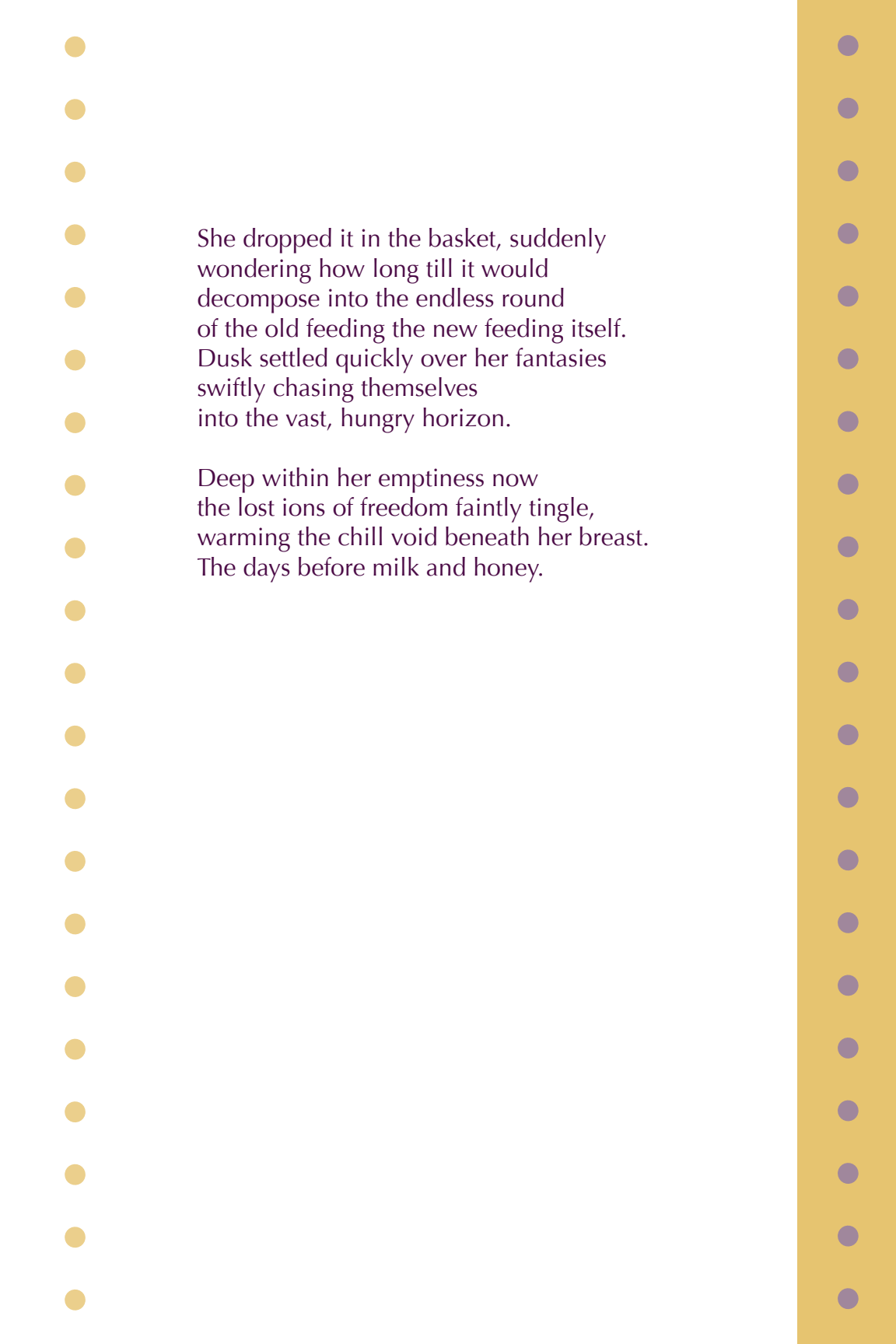
## RIVERS OF SPRING

She squeezed hard to coax the last little glop out onto her toothbrush. Her new favorite, the anise-flavored. This wasn't the licorice candy kind, grainy and smudging, that left you fallen in the false promise of satisfaction. No, this glazed the finer senses lightly, cool and delicious, splashing across her palate slippery like melting icicles.

The essence released quickly, a relief of succulence puffing through her mouth, out into her body. She shuddered slightly as it awoke her cells to young dreaming days, the princess racing into a faceless hero's arms. The days before bread and salt. "Where can I get some of this?" she'd asked, wrapped in a towel, dripping and fresh. "Here," he said.

Now in the brisk rhythm of brushing, her memory flickered to that first tremor, the wondering sighs and doubts, long kisses in the dimly lit parking lot . . . joyous days and nights in love that had swept them up into the headwaters of spring.

Finally, watching the suds spiral down the drain . . . the reverie even now watering thin on her tongue. The spent tube felt heavier than it had full and new.



She dropped it in the basket, suddenly  
wondering how long till it would  
decompose into the endless round  
of the old feeding the new feeding itself.  
Dusk settled quickly over her fantasies  
swiftly chasing themselves  
into the vast, hungry horizon.

Deep within her emptiness now  
the lost ions of freedom faintly tingle,  
warming the chill void beneath her breast.  
The days before milk and honey.

## WHEN I WAS A CHILD

When I was a child  
I ran for the sweets  
my mom always held  
in her hand.

Away from the sting  
of my dad's searing belts  
and a rage I could not  
understand.

Now I see they came here  
on assignment with me,  
to run with our dreams  
in strange land.



## RAINBOW

An ageless woman of the Pleiades  
told me I once was a native  
living near a large lake some  
centuries before the white realtors came.

Even then, I often wandered alone  
along the shores  
and across the open country.  
All life was our language . . .  
symphonies of raven caws, baby stars  
chasing across sunset ripples on the lake,  
ghost winds moaning down through  
the tree line, bumble bees making  
love with wild roses. Few remain  
to tell their story, and I speak  
for those long gone.

Maybe this is why I always felt  
mised, betrayed, by the business-  
man's history of my homeland.  
Why a life thrown to data finagling  
seems utterly desolate, as if  
clawing for numbers and outfoxing  
innocents could carry one up  
the stairway to heaven.

The lights flashing off a glistening rainbow  
trout and the fly it snags teach me  
every worthwhile thing I know.

## SUNBEAMS, MOONRAKERS

When you smiled,  
    and only guarded stares replied . . .  
when you hugged and hoped,  
    and what you longed for kept  
    wandering off in its own dreams . . .  
when you poured sugar on the wounds,  
    then stood waiting for sweetness  
    to return and wash your feet . . .

When you invest in this business  
of expectations,  
the deal goes one of two ways:  
you get what you want,  
or you don't.  
Always, it tallies up the boundaries  
of where we keep our faith.

Yet when we truly love,  
there is no give or get,  
no gifts to dog around, or hope for,  
no wondering where the bone is —  
nothing . . .

but knowing we light up the darkness  
somehow, realize our purpose.  
Love is here, everywhere,  
inviting us to rest in her.  
Too bright to see the ashes.  
Too busy being a friend  
to stop and think about it.

## THIS MUST BE DA PLACE

Earth's a compost pile,  
light and dark churn throughout it,  
making food for our gardens  
that can't live without it.

It's so horrific and mean  
this rage 'round the globe –  
we're gnashing our trashing  
like the little microbe,

Breaking down, making  
new from the old  
as the fire in this heap  
smelts our dreams for gold.

Seems we're the leftovers  
and the ones who must eat them,  
we're our gods turned loose  
and the souls who must seat them.

As we brace up each morning  
and charge out the door  
to our gardens of choices,  
to our own holy wars,

Let us blanket our worldscapes  
with bright angel seeds,  
let our hearts do the dreaming  
and sprout all our deeds.

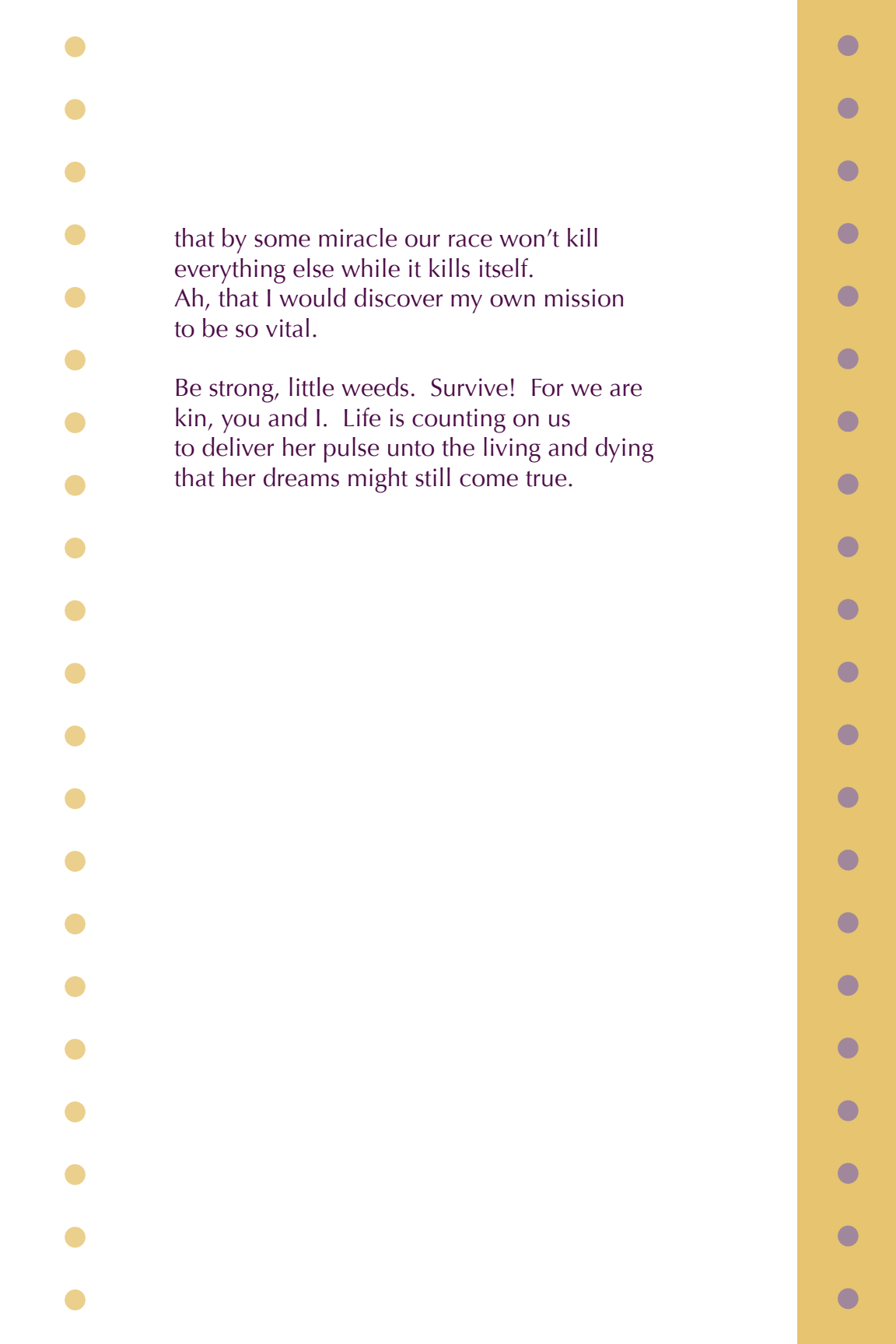
## MY LIFE AS A WEED

*[looking through photosynthesis]*

Tell me, shunted one, why do they want you dead? Your colors are a match for the loveliest splash of rainbows in this kingdom. And you are so strong, so durable, an enviable model of steadfastness and perseverance. We could sit at your feet and learn the secrets of the universe. You are so relentless, like the seasons themselves. Ah, were I so tenacious about manifesting my own dreams.

I've tried to tell them, the toxin tillers of the soil, that you bear glad tidings, even if you're worth nothing to them as a simple pocket of the sun. From deep earthen reservoirs of the raw and unformed, light magnets percolate up through your long tap roots bringing to the top soils precisely what they keep poisoning and leaching away. Could our precious sod be better fed than by thee, stout weed, oh faithful agent of our Mother's fertile breast? Oh, that I would nurture my own being so impeccably.

I tell you, precious weed, why I want you to live: To keep reminding us of our lost connections to the food we take into our bodies and minds and hearts. To help me remember to listen to what is *living* and love it to life rather than sweep it from my sight. To restore the sacred photons that the tillers have turned into mutants. To help me keep my faith



that by some miracle our race won't kill  
everything else while it kills itself.

Ah, that I would discover my own mission  
to be so vital.

Be strong, little weeds. Survive! For we are  
kin, you and I. Life is counting on us  
to deliver her pulse unto the living and dying  
that her dreams might still come true.



**Songs to my  
Guardian Angels**



## HELLO, DARLIN'

When you sailed yourself into this plane  
Earth sang out a hearty cheer!  
Somewhere inside, on my walkabout,  
a whisper said, "She's here."

Long years rolled on and with them  
came adventures, chase and pain  
of discovering my life as sacred  
so I could know you once again.

## BE WITH ME

Living in my dream come true,  
The one I promised long ago.  
Now I return to where I started,  
Here with you, the darling of my soul.

I'll bring flowers to your door  
And let them be what I would say.  
Then I'll take you in my arms,  
Thanking God for being with you today.

I call out to you  
with a voice that is true,  
Come with me,  
be with me.

And our days will go by  
with a song and a sigh,  
Come with me,  
be with me.

And I know just what I'll do  
With everything that my heart sees.  
I'll pour it all into our fire  
And what remains we'll call eternity.



## STARLIGHT

The winds are whispering through the trees,  
their voice comes in from long ago.  
Why night keeps turning into day,  
a secret they may never know.

Flowers bloom and they are gone,  
just like a lover's dream.  
The music falls into my heart  
and disappears, or so it seems.

With just a look the dance begins,  
embers simmer in your eyes.  
They long to know if you have come,  
the one who loves and never lies.

So with your orphans close at hand,  
the ones who rose from your desire,  
bring them gently through the door  
and let them rest beside my fire.

We'll tell our stories of the world,  
how life is never as it seems.  
We'll swim the oceans in our eyes,  
watch fairies play on our moonbeams.

Where you go I wish thee well,  
and where you stay please be so kind  
to love me as you love yourself,  
for that I Am, the starlight of your mind . . .

Love me as you love yourself,  
for that I Am, the starlight of your mind.

## ALWAYS COMING HOME

I sit here among the lovely  
crystals of your heart,  
like a sprout in a wondrous  
forest of towering tamaracks.  
A new sun is gently rising  
on this primeval earthen world.  
I almost dare not breathe  
lest it take my breath away.

Yet whatever I might lose  
I'll just follow back to you,  
for you have taught me well  
how everything that moves  
is always trying to come home,  
and everything at peace  
is at the door with open arms.



POWER LUNCH

Such a fine, fair lassie named Kim,  
Aye, whose heart had waned rather dim  
    Till she saw in his mirror of her  
    Love consuming the fear of her,  
While doing quite the same for him.



# Haiku

ku-ku-ka-choo

## SOLDIER, REST IN ME

They tricked up our dreams  
Ravens gather for the feast  
Homecoming parade

## FEED THE HUNGRY

The Big Bang, baby  
No one came from somewhere else  
Be the barley greens

## BUS STOPS

Jesus torched the moment  
Not one to stand on the curb  
waiting for Christmas

## IN YOUR IMAGE

You created me  
to see what your heart looks like  
smiling back at you

## ROSE

Rose keeps no secrets  
Holds no plan, desire or hope  
Love's gift is freedom

## REDEMPTION

Outland . . . hounds lap up  
Our lost blood, howling with joy  
As we come for them

## WAKING UP

Crystal mountain falls  
Tears run and tumble, racing  
off to life again.

## LIFE BEFORE

Teachers old and new  
Could not have been more perfect.  
So ready for you.



## TRINITY

A frog on a log  
I was, then on my mouth warm  
Your diamond wet eyes

A man of sorrows  
I am, but as you touch me  
Prince of every realm

My skins are vapors  
Nothing is my name, my way  
Adrift in our love

## CHRISTMAS ALWAYS

I've walked and stumbled all this way  
For decades now and many a day,  
While future shrinks and memories grow  
With blessings, heartaches in a row.

So here I pause to make a rhyme,  
What better place than Christmas time.  
A wondrous season in every way,  
I wish it would come every day.

Upon this thought a voice I heard  
From in my heart, a gentle word:  
"I hereby grant your wish, my friend.  
You shall have Christmas without end!

"For this to be I need tell you,  
Tho' strange, here's all you have to do—  
My season's love is yours each day  
If you'll just give it all away."

Nothing quite like this, I thought;  
All else is begged, bagged, borrowed or bought.  
Things come and disappear so fast  
Like toys—distract but never last.

And as my wish comes true right now  
I smile and shake my head at how,  
As I send my love and peace to thee,  
They first light up what I call me.





Vaya con Dios, amigos!