

How to Match the Sky

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

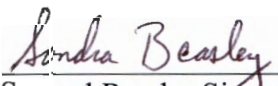
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How to Match the Sky

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How to Match the Sky

How to Match the Sky is a collection of poetry focusing on the struggle between freedom and control through an examination of familial expectations and social norms. These poems question cultural boundaries and racial lines, in pursuit of authenticity and deep self-acceptance.

A father appears as a retired show girl. A mother cripples her son. A daughter baths her father.

A white girl gets kicked off a playground. A woman makes love to a plant. A murder is committed on a porch. A boy learns how to match the sky.

A reader can get lost in this hauntingly irreverent meditation on family, suppression, race, addiction and the struggle for liberation. Readers can also be found and find themselves inside this collection, as they catch pieces of their childhood souls in Hoefft's reflective poems.

How to Match the Sky leaves those who partake of its body with the consciousness that there will always be a sense of that encounter's intimacy that can never be left behind.

For Tupelo Bee

I. Earth

Young Love

Like buds on the yew tree,
we burst into seasons
as natural as rain.

With evergreen consistency
we slowly flower;
until late summer;
when my bright red
surrounds your tender seed.

It is then that people began to see us
and call us “false fruits.”
Because our combination isn’t standard,
bored botanical minds declare we are too green.

“It will grow darker” they say,
“when it matures.”
They think our seed is primitive.
They wait for us to evolve.

But we know my nectarous, red aril
its bowl-like soft, syrupy and flush.
We know the folds of your sweet, fragile stem-like spores.
We’ve seen the way snow shimmers
when it sits on our chipper heads.

Tupelo Bee

Honey,
you're my honey,
my big, buzzin' Tupelo bee.

And when you buzz,
fuzz hums
golden and steady.

I catch you
whispering behind me—
velvet vocals
feathery and fine.

I didn't know you were there,
Tupelo.
You didn't make a sound.

Sometimes I wonder if you want to be heard.

Reverie

I thought you
were home. I heard keys jingle
near the door. I saw light
outside our window. I could feel
the built up excitement
in my stomach.
But it was the neighbor.

I thought you were home
too quick. You were going to drop
by the store and pick up honey,
a green pepper, a can of chick-peas
and a carton of eggs.

I was ready to believe
it was you.
I wanted you
home so much.

One Star

When your Uber driver asks how long you've been married,
you tell him four years.

He asks why you don't want any children—
already judging
you to be selfish.

He tells you about his kids,
how nice they are, what great jobs they have.

You want to tell him how many times you've dreamed
about that stick turning pink.

Or thought about how her tiny weight would feel
in your arms, soft belly pressed onto your chest,
how you might burst when she looks up
and you see your brown, probing eyes in hers.

You want to say shut the fuck up.
But you just nod.
Yeah, kids would be really great.

Maybe someday.

Fly Trap

Lure me,
exotic plant.
Tune my tongue
to the key of your blue-green.
Infuse this air viridian.
Release your love drug, aphrodisiac.

I drift on the hairs of your inner surfaces—
trichomes, pubescent prickles,
short, straight, soft, hispid hairs.
You are triggered by my touch.

Seal me in your succulent scent—
merciless, woody, seeping pulp.
I am eager for you.
I meditate on your smell of mint and musk.

Collapse on me.
Snap shut on me.
Squeeze me sapless.
I want to know how your stomach feels.

Reduce me to a husk of chitin,
a surrendered shell,
a deserted exoskeleton.

Ode to O

O, vagina,
you big, hot mouth—
open womb.

O, you make me open my lips—
orgasmic shock, disbelief,

realization. O.
My eyes are O's—
opening
eyelids
spread wide.

Without the big O,
body would be forced
to fake—
building frustration,
no release.

O is a coming of age piercing,
a teen's cherry.

O is my navel welcoming your licked fingers.

O is my right nipple getting jealous.

O is my circled wrapped fingers in motion,
before your lips make that pure
choir boy pucker.

Trollope Lollipop

I am not your Trollope lollipop,
your pickled whore.

Not for you to pull me out
when you are horny
or when you want to be.

I have nothing to be ashamed of.
get your shame offa me—
stickin' to me like a used condom
that flies under the chair,
abandoned for weeks
then found by a traumatized tourist
who teaches his children to practice safe sex
as though all sex with condoms is safe.

**Night Dreams or
Even Children with Tiny Horns Sprouting from their Skulls are Assumed Innocent**

An only child,
long awaited by a mother nine years barren,
he never heard no.
They only chuckled when he began to lift shirts,
seeking out Grandma's koo koo's.
Silly boy, an odd habit.
He'll grow out of it, they said.

When I awoke,
his fat, red face
was over me
glowing like a moon
gleaming like the devil.

In these moments, the body numbs the mind,
no way to explain before.
I dreamed a hand
exploring teenage breasts—
an excited philosopher probing for answers.

As I lay settled and warm,
a boy of twelve, desperate fingers
rubbing my hair and folds.

Palm pressing pubic bone,
then slipping out of my pants,
a body running down the hall, giggling.

I never spoke.

It was easier to tell myself
it was a nightmare.

Colorful Lady

I wish I was ugly

when they bark at me like hungry dogs.

Don't holler at me

like I'm an animal.

*cat

call*

Treat me like the woman

I

am—

classical

marbled bone

structure

high cheeks

free

mouth

loud

soul.

II. Water

Typology (of Water)

We grow thirsty.
As city turns its back to water,
we question the waves—
searching for power
to resurrect our hope.

The shoreline carries promise
of suffocation, burial—
that inevitable sinking.

To rise in this paradigm, we must situate sea level,
shift.
Complicate from complex morphologic to pure
architecture.

When transcendent, consider coastal resilience.

Ask: What is water?

Ask: Is it prone to rising?

I want to talk about that liquid urban fabric—
a city of water conceived,
raised to respond to the rain.

His Heart is the Californian Coast. His Heart is Paradise Cove.

for my Father

His hands are parchment
watercolor paper,
writing scratched out,
almost thrown away.

His fingers are bread-winners,
worn-out and loyal.
His fingers are artists
pent up and moody.

His forearms are Fender fret boards
ready to play.

The one hair on his otherwise bald head
is the curly-cue on cartoon babies

His knees are stinging bees,
surf boards, summer breeze
breezin' up Madeira beach.

His calves are quadruple scoop ice-cream cones,
bursting piñatas, big Florida bass.

His toes are barnacles
stubborn shells.
His toes are bratty school children.

His feet are Olympians,
legendary sprinters.
Fast, jump the hurdles.

His eyelashes are skateboards,
rollin' up and down Beach Blvd.

His lips are steady kisses on
my mother's forehead.

You are not a failure.
You are not your father.
You are not the drink.

Bathing My Father

I. Sanctus

I wash your skin to the tunes of Zeppelin—
“Going to California,” “In the Light Ocean,”
“Ten Years Gone.”

You shift under water, searching for stillness.

Pupils flash like lures
under glassy flat corneas,
refractions of light—
waves under the surface.

I am a part of you;
a piece of me swam inside you.

How you must have cleansed me, too,
my tiny girl body
faultless and pure,
like a lamb without blemish or spot.

Tangled baby-hair
spread out weightless,
medusa in the water,
your little lion-head.

I must have stared,
floating in that deepest peace—
that is water,
that is Father.

When you spoke, “time is up”
did I whine, squirming like an eel?

Or jump up like first Baptism—
restored, euphoric, drunk on overflow,
my cup runneth over
ready

for the warm towel and your voice,
this is my child, in whom I am well pleased.

II. Doxology

Now

you lie

here

trusting.

As you look up, I reach to give you what you need.

Holding your head, I soap up your white hair—

fluffy like an owl

puffy like Einstein.

When I rinse your scalp,

you make little purring sounds.

Careful not to let soap enter your eyes,

I pour slowly—

let

warm

water

fall

over

your

wrinkled

widow's

peak.

I notice the lit pillar candle—

recurrent bits of bright

twitching in oscillating ripples.

Shivering feathers fluttering,

“This moment is divine. This moment is linear, eternal, good.”

When I come back to the body,

we are one.

Gathering the soaked sponge, I begin again

III. Benediction

I paint your parchment skin—
strokes up your canvas back,
down your long arms;
arms always wrapped around a favorite Fender.

Your hand over that fret board, fingertips vibrating
emotion expressible only through the blues.

This intimacy, it kept you up at night.

Songs of Summer

I. How He Found You

father and son

When the black wood bee found you,
he was roaring.

He roared when you ran through the sprinkler.
He roared when you laughed and cried.
He roared when you came in the front door, dripping.

When you tell me about the roaring black wood bee,
how he always found you, I want to put him in a jar of liquid.
I want to shake him, for you.

But when I tell you this, you only speak of the smell of honeysuckle,
indian summers on Avenida de los Flores.

As you reminisce and laugh,
I recline, soothed and fading,
as we inhale the deepest breaths
of jasmine and geranium.

II. How You Found Him

As your mouth moves
specks of summer,
flecks of yellow light
effuse this Florida sunroom.

Childhood stories revive memories
of that suburban backyard utopia—
southern California in the 60's.

You caught bees,
shook them comatose,
buzzed bodies dulled
by the repetition of liquid in glass.

You pinned them to wood,
then waited;
wanting to watch death
overcome.

Did you know then he wouldn't come back?

III. Every last Tarantula Hawk

You used to believe she was a child-created legend,
Your boy-mind birthed fantasy.

Her long, black-blue body
bigger than a splayed hand.

Dark legs,
red wings—
hooked claws.

This creature would find the perfect hairy belly,
paralyze the large spider with a painful sting
then shave his abdomen clean and infest
her new nest with a spider-wasp egg.

You spent boyhood summers
watching the sky for these huge wasps,
looking for their spiders in the ground—
poking ice plants,
digging for life under blackness.

Two decades later, on that Colorado camping trip,
the origin of my arachnophobia,
you taught me to tease tarantulas from trapdoors
with a relentless feather.

Now, even after hours,
you still poke into that large web
to see what you can awaken.

Daddy was a Red Pen

Word man,
ice baby,
I run behind you
never fast enough.

I want to catch you,
give you words,
but you don't see.

When I write you a poem,
you edit.
You critique my love letters.
My heart is already red.

Let my words do to you.

Let them take you
and twist your mind and make you cry
deep and rusty tears
that cleanse
and leave you
light, white like peace—
dove in the wilderness.

How good you are with words.
You taught me to look at snow
and write how it feels—
like childhood, like innocence, like cold silence.

Let me be a daughter with a gift for her father.

Open and ingest.

Father as Fish

Fish sees worm.

Fish doesn't see metal glimmer.

He's not thinking about the future.

Worm will make him feel better tonight.

He's been fantasizing.

He's hungry.

He's hooked.

The story ends always

with a silver edge—his neck

never had a chance.

"Fish heads, fish heads—rolly, polly fish heads."

Perhaps the souls of aquatic vertebrates

can repent and pay for their fatal sin

by doing time in some fish purgatory

under the hard, flat surface of the ocean.

Swallowing

When I sit here drinking wine I am not thinking
of the fast or the fallen—
fragments of light
free styling through a lucid sky.

I am not thinking
of where I should be
or how I spent the last five hours
on this same leather spot.

It is only this: permission, surrender.

Sometimes nothing feels better than something.
Empty a glass or four of this
Cabernet—
little red rock star,
ready and reeling to be
the ruffian in my belly
loosening me up
as my wild hair shakes
power-chords of release.

After Glass

Hear the crackle of ice
on a hundred small lakes.

Little lines jag out like hangnails,
fragments of clear—
breaking off and jumping,
then breaking apart again.

We are held together by compression.

Underneath the tension of our brittle surfaces
we are weak—
crystalline fabrications
incapable of keeping ourselves whole.

I leave the shards on grey slate in my kitchen.

Tasseography

When our brittle Victorian lips
sipped on flowered tea cups,
you became that show doll,
prancing about in a Chinese robe.

*But silk can't cover his ruffian soul,
and those pearls don't make him fine.*

You were honest about one thing,
you do love sherry.

Now you drink it from the bottle.
No tea cozy to cover-up
lies that lie in the bottom of your glass—
leaves that tell your future.

III. Wind

Mother Cocoon

A semi-truck smashes
a husband small.

Crippling trembles shook a mother
in the kitchen—
unspoken
expectations.

Her fears dish up control.
“Dinner is served.”

I wonder what it would be like
to live with such anxiety—
to be a boy in her house,
trying to grow.

Mothering,
smothering,
injuries,
soul
suffocation.

You
cut
his
back
open
with
your
scythe.

What Holds Him

His cord was sizzled black,
a rod of iron up his back—
incense to the God of the open palm.

He swallowed jitters from a bottle
enmeshed from birth and shriveled.
This boy was born too soon.

She knew if she cut him
out a little early,
he would always be small.

Without her,
he was dead—
without her brain inside his head.

She, origin of his scoliosis.
She, steel in his spine.

Schlemiel

You were never good at waiting.
You sliced your belly,
to birth a premature fetus—
a sacrifice, to the tick-tock god on daddy's wrist.

You like him that way, deformed.
You need him, needy.

When he tried to grow, you cut him
fear-pruning. He might have spread
out of your container.

You gave him two sick seconds to answer.
Because he took six, you spoke for him.

Muted puppet, paralytic without you—
awkward runt,
half-birth fuck-up,
Your stupid Schlemiel.

Silence like a Cemetery

There is a hush on this burial ground.

I kneel on cold, grey stone

to lay my lilies.

Don't let the dead rise,

the unspoken rule makes us hold our hearts,

keeps them buried, too.

We walk with fearful steps,

afraid of what is under us,

all that was left misunderstood.

Southern Lady

My mother is an edifice.
That fan, those jewels, these gloves
parasitized by that sweet potato whitefly
that is the South,
that is Alabama.

You could've grown like Grandma Lily's yellow verbena,
fragrant and wild.
How you could've climbed,
holy to the sky.

Sometimes I think I see you blush.
I want to reach out
ready to catch your tears before you powder powder powder powder powder.

When you return from the ladies' room, I wonder what parts of you are really here.
Your little white forearms, bricks in some Antebellum dam.

What we don't speak of

hushed tones, hushed tones.

We wouldn't want to stir the water,
or start a fight.

Keep positive, chin up.

The rest—

under the rug.

Or in the backroom,
where father is in his daughter's bed.

Hush.

We want to be happy.

Under quiet floorboards,
lie little pieces of who we are—
muted in polite, hushed tones.

Easy

You never disagree.

I pick the restaurant.

I pick the movie.

I love you the way a child loves
a door-mat mother who never says no.
I get sick on you, like Halloween candy.

That last time in bed,
I caught a flicker of desperation
in your dull eyes
before I pushed you down
into reverse missionary.

An Uprooting

Let the old _____ fall.

Bring me a _____,

infuse this ground with seedlings.

Let me be swept up from this town,

feet wet, heart _____.

I want to land,

the way all good _____ do;

not prodding in the muck of then—

through hooks and ringworms.

I refuse to sink here,

in what seeks to collect all underneath me,

connecting me to the black floor

and holding me down like a suffocating _____.

IV. Fire

Recess

Once a little black girl had to play at a different playground.
She was excluded because of her skin.

Now a little white girl wants to jump rope with her.
She is excluded because of her skin.

Music of Mexico

With the muted glow of sundown
the families at the end of our cul-de-sac
come outside. They sit
in frayed yellow beach chairs.
One of them tells a story, another laughs.

Is this living in community?

Is this living unafraid?

On Fridays manic mariachi music fills our dead-end street.

Abuelos sip Coronas while children ride bright tricycles and scooters,
shouting and pretending they are superheroes or el presidente de Mexico City.

Their music marks
the end of the street
their fiesta property.

When we walk by we pretend
we do not hear them
we pretend
we do not see them.

As we close our eyes to sleep, we can still hear laughing
and trumpets solo and puff into the ozone of this common air.

Murder on the Porch

I sprayed a wasp's nest—
got right in his territory
and pummeled him
with pesticides.

Now the corroded shell lays
on hard cement
withering—
a warning
to other stinging insects,
this house is not yours.

Hallucination

The last time I left I stayed away.

He always forgot

I was pretty.

He was a twisted cop—

pocketing cash

from immigrants, he pulled over.

“They don’t belong here anyway.”

I wanted to believe he was innocent, so I shut up

evidence to keep my hoaxed-up hope.

We used to wrestle.

He would hold me down so good.

It was sexy feeling that vulnerable.

But sometimes he couldn’t stop.

High school wrestling

trauma messed up his mind.

He’d keep grappling me down

harder, like he was stuck

in the glory of the ring.

And that night, I was naked

in our sheets, my body shiny with moon;

when he asked, I lied.

That was not a sexy kind of vulnerable—

waiting, in only my skin, for his reaction.

I thought he was going to kill me.

He still stacks bricks
in his yard
hoping the world sees
a good man.

Anatomy of Connection

My lungs are bound to you.

My windpipe mimics your breath.

Even my stomach aches in a way it never has—

deep in my gastric folds, I hear intestines squeezing out your name.

What Makes a Hero

I have love anxiety.

I shake like a terrified wall.

Inside this shell

steel echoes, “never again”, “again”, “again”, “again.”

Persistent inventor, why are you dedicated to me? Your little fool. Your Frankenstein.

Your lightness only bright in front of the backdrop of my imagined sin.

Attempting heroism, you lift

this sacrifice. Pulling me out of a pit

with a strangling.

What hero crushes so that he can put back together?

Once, I watched your lighthouse on the shore, believing you could save my ship.

Now, I feel jagged rocks in my body when I think of you.

Come Out

You are afraid
of adults
who told you not to dance
around the cakewalk—
made you march
square to square.

Dance light beams,
break them out of you—
rays of coppered magenta
from your flowing arms.
Bending elbows and knees sizzle
in abiding motion—
affecting the atmosphere.

Little girl, dance
when you hear the blues on Las Olas,
or at Holiday park when trees start the party
by swaying to your same magical groove,
or at his funeral when it's too much
to sit quiet in your own kind of coffin.

Little girl,
I long for you—
big, wild soul
bursting to be known.

How to Match the Sky

The sky, like raw, ruddy bones over back lit snow, speaks in tiny sparks—
scarlet pin pricks resurrecting
feathers over campfire.

The boy bathes in fear of her mouth.
Upon letting go, paper split his lips.

Now he hums to the wind, asking with a shield,
in this exhausted menagerie of voices—
bending like metal necks in fire, stretching to be seen.