# Beautiful Blue Sky

Poems by Tim Pompey

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Cover Photo:

Frosty Autumn Scene in Pisgah National Forest

Jerry Whaley

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### Water

#### Beautiful Blue Sky Part I

From my bench on Santa Cruz Island, I see blue everywhere, from bluff to water to the misty shores of the California coast.

It's so intense, I think I may have found a sacred point where the holy divides itself equally between heaven and earth.

Save for the summer breeze and the sounds of birds, it is quiet, the boats and swimmers below small as a George Stuart exhibition.

What am I doing here? The question hangs over me like the sun, eyeing me with hot pursuit.

*Searching*—the answer—but beyond that, my eyes have settled on nothing but blue, eternal blue, the void of land and space.

Here I am emptied of all but yearning, the yen to be carried somewhere beyond blood and flesh and let my being be holy absorbed. So compelling the vision, so urgent the need to be filled with new life, I cannot breathe.

So I wait, under a beautiful, blue sky, like a child expecting their parents, or Christmas, or birthdays; that magic moment of arrival.

I wait for the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, the fulfillment of this lengthy, blue promise.

I have waited all these years. I am still waiting, expectant, an azure ocean keeping me buoyant. Sailing with the Dolphins

Tidal waves of purple and silver sprint for our boat.

What they seek, mysterious, as if we are extended family.

There is something interconnected in our brain's synapses. The animal in us, the human in them.

Their wake is my childhood. Their energy, my joy.

Carry me, brothers and sisters. If I could dive, cavort and leap, I would leave it all for speed and somersaults.

In the wake of this short life, with your churning companionship, let me spend my final days frolicking. Solitary Sea Turtle

Gliding alone in Australian waters on a current to somewhere, the sea turtle basks.

What's known to him I cannot read but when I see this large, prehistoric animal, I am drawn to:

head stretched forward, body suspended. blue-green waters,

Pilgrims we are in solitude, the waters leading us till we reach our destinations.

Our steps on this earth clumsy, a heavy object seeking weightlessness, and the solace of drifting

like a slow spirit, without need for thought or time, our soulful natures content.

#### Ocean Thoughts

I thought in the end there might be a story to tell, and someone to listen.

Instead, there is a beach, the sound of waves crashing, and the solitude of my thoughts.

The ocean claims what it touches without glory or fanfare. All of us arrive here at some point, the road unwound.

Around curves and highways, I have let time pass. So much time. But here is where it stops. The sand and my footprints, the waves washing.

I peer into the vastness, the approaching sunset, and take deep breathes. The ocean will claim me, a small, disappearing granule. But I will always be here as a grain on the shoreline.

I look hard to the islands. My ears hear whisperings. There is yet life out here.

And I am convinced that this beach and my feet will be whisked outward, upward, toward the heavens, and back to the sea, as if my life, and the currents playing, are bound in matrimony.

#### Mother Pool

My mother cradles me in the water, her womb soothing.

Around my body, her arms lift and buoy me.

Outside this uterus, I am lost in my own skin.

I cannot tell you how lonely, how far beyond rescue I am.

The water is her voice singing gentle melodies.

Yet I am old and creaking, dried and fragile.

A house deserted, soon to tilt. As Jesus in the Jordan, yielding to the Spirit the voice I yearn for, the touch that soothes—

her hands, my baptism, and a voice.

#### The Water Poem

I grew up by a creek. I played on the shores. I searched for crawdads. I crossed boulders. I dove into the cold. I fished. I water skied. I've played with minnows and crossed bridges. I've plunged deep and pretended I'm a whale. When I swim, I am near to God and bathed in glory.

There is no life without water. There is no Creation. God lived on the waters before there was Earth. When I drink water, I am feasting on myself. Each droplet a tiny point of nourishment. This is part of our rubric, our love, our identity.

Today my skin is dry, my eyes as well. I mourn for water and seek it like treasure. When I die and crumble to dust, my bones brittle, my skin parchment, in an after life, perhaps heaven, there is the promise of a river and rejuvenation, eternal water, God's lifeblood, my happiness.

The thought of it makes me smile.

### Heaven and Earth

#### Great Gods of the Universe

They are pictures with technical names: ACO S 295, Messier 81, Antennae galaxies, the Milky Way. Colored intricately, highlighted by white light.

It takes faith to believe in their existence. Faith in the telescope and camera. Faith in my yearning.

And that is what draws me in. As if my eyes are sewn to them. As if my name is part of their life.

My existence is called into question. My tiny life part of a much wider life. Existence of existence personified.

When I end, they are still beginning. When I am forgotten, they shine on. Science will always pursue them. People will always worship them. Bigger than theology or God, brighter than knowledge, their ellipse proof of Creation.

Here at my desk, on a small computer, The Black Eye peers at me, its white cauldron roiling.

In my mind, I feel its tug, the power and calling, like Mitra or Amun, as if someday my freed soul will wander in their paths.

#### Lovely Lavender Lady

The evening's lavender is a gowned empress gliding across the hills on her way to a ball, a premiere, a sparkling soirée of the night.

The drivers, the gawkers, the shoppers, the walkers watch her stroll by, ringed by mountains deftly holding her train.

The sky is her coming out party, and for a brief, brilliant moment, those watching can do nothing but admire and whisper:

Who is she wearing?

International S.O.S.

How distant our lives split by continents and oceans different voices blaring , the babble of nations.

Our eyes focus on the screen rapidly interpreting, rapidly responding.

The planet warms. The AR-15s fire. Our lives boil with danger.

The keys to salvation are scrapped for wars and money.

From the moon, the blue planet reflects. From a satellite, it remains peaceful.

What would make us think otherwise? As we blink at the screen. Will the Messiah allow us access? Will the revolution heal us?

The planet has chopped us into languages, culture, politics, and spit us out.

I write these lines in English and throw them across continents.

Is it too much to ask the Earth and Evolution to answer with a little mercy? Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest

These families grew and thrived for millenia:

sycamore, basswood, oak, beech, yellow-poplar, their roots entwined peacefully in self-defense.

Without voices.

Without human contact. Without traces of my ancestors.

Whole cities of roots, more widespread than New York.

When the axes and saws arrived,

when the first tree fell,

a shiver bristled through the forest.

How utterly sad the day the first man pointed and said: That one. That one is my house.

And so it goes.

The cities are gone.

In their place, the homeless, transplants, and survivors.

Small villages with paths. Invading eyes peering up. Lonely groves, and wanderers asking—where do we belong? There is Peace in the Snow

As I walk the street, the soft flakes grab my sleeves.

My vision is blurred. I can't tell back from front. There is only this moment and the absence of sound.

Snow brings me to a halt, momentarily, like sleep. It fills my empty space with greys and whites.

Perhaps this is the afterlife. The promise of passing. When time disappears, and there is only peace.

But today, I am not counting anything.

The past, the future, gone. I am disconnected and stirred by silence. Staring into the flurried sky, I think of nothing except moving, moving, like a ghost, one step toward the invisible.

In faith, I carry on. In faith, I trust my feet. Snow and faith, simultaneous. Among Redwoods on a Rainy December Day

Whispering like nuns, the cloistered redwoods circled me, unphased by rains.

They were strength against storms. They were watchful, veiled saints.

The showers eased and tapped to Latin prayers.

I am caught by surprise.

The car stilled. The road stretched. Time pauses, awed by their towering presence.

I stopped moving: evening vespers, synchronous reverence, bound by the Spirit.

The surrounding quell a deference to holiness.

#### Poinsettia

The forest green leaves and bright red flowers spread wide across its lot, a bulwark of greeting.

Winter has stolen its prominence. A cold, fatal cut. A loss so deeply felt.

The day light passes without comment, but the sun is veiled in grey. No doubt. In mourning.

The poinsettia offered cheer and Christmas pleasure. A flag waving. A glimpse toward heaven.

Spring has come with its branches sheered. We wait for a sign, like the coming of messiah.

If faith is lost, can it be reborn? Does birth follow death? Buried deep beneath the thick roots, a secret.

The poinsettia's heart. Beating: yes or no? The truth of the matter. The hope of resurrection. Our patient waiting.

## People and Places

Invisible Man

If I wander, I wander high where there is no air or light

and thoughtlessly, void of direction.

All the known paths I choose to avoid. I've been there. I know the outcomes.

Past the trails, above the peaks, taller than clouds, where blue and black mingle.

Yes, I am solitary. It is my nature, but not without contact with galaxies. Catch me if you will. Here I am elusive. Here I am speed.

Whatever hope you had for me is long let loose and I live reckless.

Look up. That brief flash from the sun. That tiny falling star at dusk. I am there and gone, born as spark and spirit. A Family Portrait: Son, Father, Grandfather

The little boy gazes at the camera. His eyes ask so many questions about the world around him, the two men important in his life, the person taking the picture.

He wonders why he's here. His frame so small in an adult world. His place unsecured.

Looking at that photo, I see myself, that boy, my hands unsure, still wondering.

Wake up, man! I want to say. Time is running out.

With a world still to grasp, with choices and responsibilities, the world at large is still large.

But luck of the draw, there is still time and choice. Write your own pictures, I tell that boy. Fill those frames till they burst.

### Father In Absentia

When I was young, I missed you. As an old man, I still wonder about the difference between you and I.

Whether you are living or dead, I am surrounded by your atmosphere:

Service records, a Greek coin, wedding photos. They remind me. I *have* a father. You are not and yet you remain.

When I think of me, I think of you, what you were and what I am, how, even absent, you've infiltrated me.

As if, walking down a sidewalk, I expect you to be waiting by a fence wondering why I refuse to come in.

There is no need because I know when I walk back, sit in a chair, watch TV, or piece together puzzles, you have already invited yourself in. Not by choice, and yet of my choosing, you and I, cut the same. I cannot throw off your clothes. The fit, the symmetry. I cannot avoid the shoes of what we both

are.

### What My Eyes Can't See

The scenes stretched in front of me, the sky, clouds, hills, the bright-green ocean, only masquerade the real.

They are a canvas extended, an artist's rendition, a physical blind.

I peer into the night sky, gaze at photos of galaxies, stare into the sun.

Distance is what I note. The faraway distance of ignorance. The senses dancing. My head transformed.

But this is not truth. The shadows of it all reel around the edges, hints faintly, but does not reveal. In my mind's eye, it plays music at different speeds. I cannot see, but I am convinced it's out there, like smoke speaks of fire, and mist hints of rain. Like the planet evolves species, and words reveal languages.

See the facemask across my mouth. Ask yourself. Are these really my eyes? Conquistadors Across Texas

The land is trod with treachery, a witness to the blood.

Silently, it secrets held as wheels, boots, cannons, wagons cattle, horses, and humans advance persistently.

What it might tell us if it could. What it might draw with a brush. A canvas of cravenness.

The wind knows and turns its eyes. The clouds seek asylum.

Tell me prophets, settlers, conquerors, drifters, cowboys, chiefs. Tell me horses, buffalo, wolves, deer, eagles, bears.

The story changes with the teller as if forgetfulness equals victory.

Come all who follow on highways and trails, on roads crooked and straight.

Tell me your story, but do not ask the land. It grieves and tucks itself deeper.

*Judgment*, it cries, but the judges have scattered. In their place: gods, spirits and saints. Silent eyes watching. Bird Songs

This is our legacy. Weapons, buildings, vehicles. Unquestioning faith in ourselves.

Usurpers and users. Consumers and eaters. Pirates and bandits.

Oh, Earth, should we confess? Are last rites enough to save us?

There is writing on the wall and voices in the sky, but no one else to blame.

As I sit quietly and watch the news, our grusomeness on full display, I can only conclude: *We are fucked*.

Meanwhile, in my orange tree, a mockingbird sings, and a dove coos. Are they happy or mourning? While the Earth bears our burden (not by choice), if we would simply disappear, and the planet breathes a sigh of relief

Who would mourn us?

## Copperhill, Tennessee

Once I passed through Copper Hill on my way to evangelize; rode quietly past stripped hillsides mined for copper, a mountainous, barren, acidic, desert.

Decades later, and I am still speechless. The pitiless remains. The paradise ruined. Destruction and cravenness.

Something in our heads is also stripped, as if we are ostracized, outcast, and born to plunder. Our curse as masters is to gnaw beauty and spew dirt.

The seed of destruction hurtles toward us like a perilous boil. The circle grows outward, reverberating ash and sulphur. Hell on earth. Save us, O Lord from our brazen dullness.

Past Copperhill, I acted normal. I am still acting. But normal is more difficult to grasp because now I smell smoke. I feel the breath of fire. Through the Grasslands

Tilled, planted, exposed. What once spread like seas hides beneath crops.

The Spaniards wandered lost. The sun their only direction. *Forever*, they thought.

The buffalo, also eternal. No one imagined their loss. Life perpetually green.

What pestilence came? What sharp instruments cutting veins and spilling blood?

No buffalo now. Only farms strewn across the plains. Grass no more.

Except here, as a witness. Behind fences, split by roads. A land of ghosts and skin walkers. The remains a lovely graveyard, everywhere haunted, quiet except for the wind.

Grasslands deserted. Prayers vanished. Life of life, plowed under.

# Kyoto Temple

There is a way to blend here in this forest beside these waters. A force in search of harmony. Trees and lake. Sky and building. A bridge across. Thoughts and prayers built with metal and wood.

A shelter in chaos, barely visible, a peace offering against holocaust. Kyoto temple drawing a line a ripple, a toehold, an invitation for sanctuary.

The line, the peace, the temple itself, tucked in a tiny borough against the terror of tomorrow.

Will it hold?

# Toward What End

The Valley of Dry Bones

—Ezekiel 37—

Where I live, not quite dead but emaciated, with drifting smoke and the sun's misery.

More than a valley, a planet dying, missiles aimed, a war of attrition.

This morning I heard a sermon. The word spoken to rising bones. But that prophecy rings hollow.

Ezekiel is dead. The Temple is gone. The bones have scattered.

Is there a prophet among us? Someone to resurrect the Word? Does the Spirit still listen? Bodies are piled like skyscrapers. And you ask me to believe? Oh, Ezekiel. The decimation. The silence of empty skulls.

Speak now, if you will. Our fate speeds forward. The finger nears the button.

The rattle in the distance, a dry, empty sky, a dusty scroll.

No home for these bones. The faithful departed. This morning's sermon, a harbinger.

The valley of bones, a brittle cairn braced against a woeful storm.

## Statement of Doubt

What I am asked to believe flies me toward the universe, known, unknown and raises questions which I, so small, cannot hope to answer.

Doubter, you say. Have faith. Faith, I ask, in what?

On a planet inhabited by the homicidal and inscrutable, among galaxies and lights beyond a telescope.

People of faith exhort and encourage me to fly blind. I know what they mean and why.

So tiny, so distant our minds, less than sand, younger than time, and time is running out. What then, should I say? Should I speak to the universe? Should I tell you what I *don't* know?

Forgive me spirit, if I stumble. If the human squawks only distract.

I *am* flying blind, in the dead of night with the truth beyond reach while prophets point fingers and preachers mumble politics.

Tonight the stars line up to observe. But in our universe, full of return gazes, our eyes fail us.

## Manifesto

I live on this earth of discontent, but not willingly. I would trade with a tree or a bird. This self-destruction, craving flesh of fire, the means I have to destroy what I love, it goes against the grain.

I am not naive. I know the earth well. Volcanoes, hurricanes, fires. The earth's power. Are we somehow connected: Bones and dirt? Blood and water?

Still, I would exchange it all for a moment, for a lifetime, however brief

to be a cumulus cloud or an alpine mountain, a bald eagle or a live oak to be locked into my setting: a home, a habitat, a refuge, to welcome rain and rivers, sun and snow,

to know this is where I belong, to breathe without remorse. Point of Order, Please

What did God create in the Garden? A certain order to things. A man and woman put in charge.

But free will being such, the scheme blew up, and what evolved?

In retrospect, it seems the Earth was fine without us. Nature took its own course. Things progressed.

But this story, the Creation story, thrown in the middle of evolution, the Miocene, the Pliocene, the Pleistocene, the Holocene.

It's a question for scientists, anthropologists, philosophers, theologians, and mucks like us watching humans self-implode.

Meanwhile, the clock ticks. Everyone argues their point. If only we would . . . But we're avoiding the crux, as if, by pointing a finger, we might get struck by lightning, as if God and lightning were one.

Someone has to ask, if just for clarification. God, Creation, Adam and Eve. Life drummed up with a crystal ball. I just can't help but wonder: Given our nature and willfulness, and a strong sense of divine intuition:

Why us?

From a High Vantage Point

Tell me, O forest, about quiet. Your vast family spreads, the seeds of your kin sown wordlessly without complaint.

Our world is rushed and hasty, a cauldron of discontent. Our families are ingrown. Our fields full of walls.

Across hills and mountains, your growth is green and even, milleniums of roots tied as rope.

There is symbiosis among partners, a cooperative ecosystem joined in matrimony, holding earth as its child, nurturing the whole world.

We are obsessed with mowing and clearing and building until all that is green is forced and hidebound. Talk about freedom. What do we know about freedom? What do we care?

We sought it, but only for ourselves, as if all that grows belongs to us. The earth, the forests—our estates.

And now we manage, we plan, we reign. We wage war, we capture. We live randomly in hard spaces.

Our forests are lifeless, breathless, plastic, metal, alloy, blinking towers.

Roots, water, fiber, capillaries. Burnt, dried, wire-bound prisons. Human pods of isolation.

O, forests, we are unforgiven. We are weapons of self-destruction. We are godless carriers of misery. The living have died. The dead are raging. The wraiths are spying. The warlords are coming.

Sharp, sharp, all our tools. Sharp, sharp, our teeth gnashing. From the roots to the crowns, I hear your cries and every branch wringing.

And still, spread wide along the rivers and hills, the last of your royal blood, the children of the children for countless generations.

I sit and watch. You grow and wait. The sky above. The sun. The rain and clouds. They pass, germinate, then return again each season. This is home, what we cut down. This is the beginning that we uproot. The Word of the Lord spoken gently. Spoken, then forgotten, our memories ruined.

This is our heart razed and burned. This is our life that we forget. Our blood sucked from the soil.

Our faith, our hope, our joy. What have we left if not the root?

Come now, acknowledge. Bow and repent. Come and start again with simplicity. Find what's missing, what's left of our souls. This is the one last hope we have. The one ringing cry for mercy. This is the edge that we skirt. The line between Alpha and Omega. What is more important? What is a higher priority?

The clouds are smoking. The fires belching. On the brink, we stand between heaven and hell, like clowns laughing, while times ceases, the moment passes, and we let go the final thread, our sole shred of salvation.

#### What Comes Next

I do not know you, born in a desert or a mountain. The distance between us is more than just space. Blood, flesh, mind, human. The same universe but much different eyes.

Our commonality is not at all common. Our feet stand apart on different soils. Our tongues do not agree. The planet that belongs to us is not ours.

Our machines engage and grind, push and shove. Look at how we suffer and rage against ourselves. Skin to skin. Blood to blood. The same, yet not.

Is this evolution or revolution? Fate or consequence?

On a planet interlocked, destinies intertwined, it seems that hope and faith are dying.

One world we have, a small star. We did not ask, yet here we are. Counting down, the clock near midnight. It seems we have no choice. Our governments gone mad.

Speak, my friend, against the wind. Let your breath be heard.

Tonight I am alone in my room. I write my own words in this corner. If light can travel into space and be seen, what are the odds of you listening?

We are teetering and tilting out of balance. We are gasping for strength. What is a vowel against this madness?

But tonight, it is all we have. You and I caught in this moment. Strangers on a ship. Soldiers in a dying army.

One thought to the next. Across opposite lines. Blindness run amok. In this , we see clearly the cause and the conflict. Have courage now to form words and thoughts, to create a last ditch effort, to raise a desperate clarion call.

Speak, and the wind will carry you.

Earth and I in Mediation

The wound is deep between us, scars still bleeding. They will not heal. And yet.

This Earth on which I live, this wild, beautiful Earth, not benevolent or kind, bent against my progress, is still my home.

What shall I say in trial? What defense? We are formed from the same substance. Soil, water, air. You are my mother.

But I am not inclined to be your son. Not yet.

Where shall we meet? On whose terms? There is no arbiter or judge. Only knowledge and humility.

Bring forth the trees. They are observant. Bring forth the sky. It embraces. Bring forth the water. It nourishes. The wound is deep and I have caused it. Let me know how. What surgery. A cut toward healing. If God is here, shall she judge? Shall I ask to reconcile?

### Beautiful Blue Sky Part II

Whether evolutionary or by design, I have a place here. the life I bear, part of the plan. Intelligence defines us and self-destruction, the war to dominate, to have more than we need, more than we desire, to seek godness.

What do I seek? In this moment of seeing. A road perhaps beyond myself. Up ahead, a beautiful blue sky. Clear and quiet. A step upward. A child reasoning. An adult discerning.

Many roads lead here. But the line between one and the next. That path of longing and union. What is natural, what is spiritual. The clean air of thought. A moment of righteousness.

My arms extend toward clarity. Take a breath. Fill your lungs. This the sky within our reach. The color we seek. Our world. Our sanctity. The illumination. The world in which we live. The gift of living.