



**Works by Kate Gray, Poet and Novelist. Reading Wednesday October 5<sup>th</sup>, 7:30pm, University of Portland Bookstore.**

In *Any More, Black Shoe*, Kate Gray's novel-in-progress, the poet, Sylvia Plath and the younger sister of William F. Buckley, Jr., Maureen Buckley, step into and out of roles prescribed by race, class, gender and religion in 1953. Kate's first novel, *Carry the Sky* (Forest Avenue, 2014) stares at bullying without blinking. Her first full-length book of poems, *Another Sunset We Survive* (2007) was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award and followed chapbooks, *Bone-Knowing* (2006), winner of the Gertrude Press Poetry Prize and *Where She Goes* (2000), winner of the Blue Light Chapbook Prize. Over the years she's been awarded residencies at [Hedgbrook](#), Norcroft, and Soapstone, and a fellowship from the Oregon Literary Arts. Her passion comes as a teacher, writing coach, and a volunteer writing facilitator with women inmates and women Veterans. She and her partner live in a purple house in Portland, Oregon with their sidekicks, Rafi and Wasco, two very patient dogs. *(Poems and prose are reproduced here with author's approval for classroom use)*

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From *Another Sunset We Survive* (Cedar House Books, 2007)

**Long Row on Hatches Pond**

At sunset all trees turned liquid, bark shimmering  
like fish scales. Steep hills of pine sloped  
into the lake; trees grew close. Branches dark  
and interlocking kept me off shore. Near a pine  
knocked down, I cast a lure for a wide-mouth  
bass to bite. Few did. Still I rowed the old  
metal boat far from the abandoned shack, the dock,  
the landing where birches gathered. At the far end  
reeds sprung cattails. Redwing blackbirds bristled  
warnings. After one enormous pull I tucked  
the oars like wings, hurled my raw body headlong  
into the bow, arms stretching over gunwales, chest  
pressing the ridge, my nose nearly plowing into water.  
I parted lily pads, flew low through a forest of weeds  
until I thudded but did not tip. Rolling to face the sky  
darkening, my seat on the hull, legs draped over bench,  
I heard the thick crickets trill the night, truce  
from stifling day. Then wind came to drag me home.

**Elegy for Kippy Liddle at Twenty-Three**

Her oar slapped us, backed us through walls  
some girls learn. She was our guide  
to powers girls combine, as all  
eight rowers jumped high at her call  
to pass pain by, to find our fears denied.  
She slapped us, backed us through false walls,  
the isolating words, the feeble notions we fall  
prey to. With taut muscles, we did not hide  
the power eight combined when "ready-all"  
we rowed. If we broke, we stalled  
the steady run, the dreams of women riding  
the slap of strokes that backed us through the walls,  
the rough waters women are to skirt or crawl  
within. Trusting in the glide, she widened  
the power eight of us believed all  
women everywhere, willing to stand tall,  
will use to show our strength, not hide  
our power. To take the risks set all  
eight minds. In every stroke, our doubts dispelled.  
We leapt to follow Kippy's lead. Her glide  
And slap of oar steered the boat against the tide.  
Steadily she backed us through the wall  
to love, the power she left us all.

## On September 12, I Can't Stop

staring at one businessman falling headfirst  
from the tower. His arms and legs do not paw  
the air. He is not a kite with his tie a tail.  
He is more missile than man, his head the dome  
And trigger, his body a titanium shell, just as vivid, just  
as dumb. Now I know the clammy hold of images, why  
the eye flickered and bulged in the broken window  
of the college locker room years ago where I showered  
in a different man's gaze. And it is the calm of this man  
urging me to stare over and over, the magnified shot  
of his face, his eyes watching the unrepentant street,  
the approach of a terrible body, its greeting  
a shattering. I can't leave him. In his descent  
I finger a slick, clean fear and a grace  
so fierce it whistles like a bomb.

## Catch and Release

Just past boathouses south of Ross Island, flashes  
of struggle showed a fish caught firm. Silver shards  
broke thin skins of water. Yesterday my friend's brother  
died that way. Like a greedy sea lion, AIDS batted him back  
and forth, broke eardrums, pierced jawbone, stripped  
flesh from ribs. Before the end when seizures were sure signs  
nerves still worked, his body like divers arching  
into back-dives plummeted, flopping him flat-backed  
on sweat-stained beds, splashed him with  
spasms, shocks, regrets. Only when family arrived  
did nurses let him swim in valium. Yesterday doctors, fishers  
of empty shells, unhooked him from tubes, let him go  
dead. All I can do today is resist the slap of water passing  
and back through shifting currents with a brittle bow.

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From *Carry The Sky* (Forest Avenue Press, 2014)

## Taylor / The Pair

Looking for you in the library was easy. Your carrel was third floor, left from the staircase, right at the end of the stacks, left at the corner of the inner courtyard. It was prime real estate, the sunken desks right by the windows, Beach Front, we called it.

"Let's go," I said. I was ten steps away. The people around us looked up.

Your brown hair hung slightly below your shoulders, and your head was bent over history books. A ten-page paper due tomorrow.

You didn't turn around. "I don't hear you," you said.

So I was tiptoe and quiet sign to the girl studying behind you. Stepping on her desk, between her books and notes, I launched over your head, landed on your desk. It didn't break, but the sound was bigger than breaking.

You jumped. Everyone on the Beach Front yelled "Hey" and "Cut it out" and "Grow up." You grabbed my arm and pushed me into the stacks.

"What are you doing?" You tried to be quiet.

"Studying," I said.

"Yeah, right," you said. Too long hair and bangs swooping up like horns, your face was hidden behind glasses too big. You stuck your face in my face like if you got closer to mine, you'd understand.

"Let's go," I said to the glasses and hair.

"Where?" Your hand was still on my arm, thumb and fore-finger light on my tricep, the grip through my flannel shirt. My hands took both your shoulders. They filled my hands, the muscle of so much rowing. I turned us in a dance in the library stacks.

"Tell you when we get there." I turned you down the stacks toward the stairs.

My light blue VW wagon started like a lawnmower, pull, pull, turn over. You in your stained sweats, me in my flannel shirt and sweats, we sat there waiting for the engine to warm up. That Sunday morning in April was cold and

blue, and the blankets from the back seat were all the heat we had. We wrapped up.

The drive to the lake was away from Mount Greylock, the highest point in Massachusetts, which made you laugh because in Colorado, you lived at a higher elevation than the mountain's peak. Then we passed alongside the Taconic Ridge, which the farmers called the train of elephants, one hill, the mother, touching the next hill, the child. The hills rolled for miles in their slow New England train. We didn't talk. The crocuses in clumps in front of farm houses. Cows standing in a foot of mud. Ice still in the marshes.

No one was at the boathouse. The dock stretched into the blue-black of the lake, turning the green hills of the nearest shore into purple on the surface. I lifted the cinder block to reach the hidden key.

"How did you know where that was?" you said.

"We have ways," I said in my best imitation of Colonel Klink on *Hogan's Heroes*.

The handle of the big bay turned clockwise, kicking the lock open. After we lifted the door up, the smell of wax on the eights was honey around us. The April morning light was a thick yellow line down each hull stacked on the right-hand racks. The smaller shells were on the far left rack. I headed left.

"No way," you said. Standing in the bay put the dock and the lake and the reflection of green behind you.

"Come on. Just because we both row port doesn't mean we can't row a pair." A pair takes a perfect balance of port and star-board. One of us switching sides meant rolling the blade up with a different hand, like writing with a different hand. We could flip.

"Surely you jest." You were taking Shakespeare.

"Hands on." I gave the command. Since you knew I'd carry the shell by myself and smash it if you didn't get there, you ran to the rack.

Once out of the rack, the shell rested on our shoulders while we walked to the dock. Up and over our heads and up, we rolled it down to the waist and down, and down to the water, no splash. We got the oars, tied in, and pushed off the dock.

Stroking was what you were born to do. Your back read like the scriptures you included in notes to me: "Love one another as I have loved you . . . greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Your notes were shoreline, evening light, moon. How we talked to each other was stream. This note with this Bible verse was the one I read over and over, memorized, as if its moon shadow would lead me where I wanted to go.

At the catch position, you sat up, your back a V-shape. On command we set the blades and pulled, but we tilted left, then right. I barely got my blade out at the finish of the first stroke, my right hand unsure how to roll up, my left hand unsure what to do with the handle of the oar.

By twenty strokes we were beginning to move together. When I dragged the oar or when I caught water with the tip, you said, "Oh?" like "Are we going in?" But through the dips left and right, your back was sure. Your back was part of something bigger, bigger than the pair, the lake, Mount Greylock in the distance.

"Hey, kiddo," you said, "we're getting it."

"Oh yeah, Olympic trials, next stop," I said. It was hard to talk and row.

We rowed past the cove we used for practicing starts. We rowed past the boys' camp used in the summer. On the other side of the lake, I steered us to a dock.

"Way enough," I said. The angle wasn't right, and we were coming in too fast.

"Hold water," I said. You dug in your blade. We turned into the dock without crashing the bow.

"Nice landing," you said. "Ready?" I said and put one foot up to stand on the dock.

"For what?"

"Your turn."

"*Nyet.*" You were taking Russian, too.

"*Oui, si,*" I said, "whatever." I knelt down to hold the pair off the dock.

With one foot under, you stood up on the dock. You said, "Okay, you asked for it." One step to get behind me, one step to bend down, the shove was not too hard, but enough to throw me off balance.

The way a girl learns to dive, kneeling at the edge of a pool, pointing her alligator arms at the blue, then rolling, I rolled far enough out to miss the pair. The water was ice. It was blue slivers in my lungs. I came up yelling.

Hard laughs made you hold your thighs. I kicked up from the water, used my arm as a bat, and batted the water to cover you with spray. Drenched, your hair was no longer horns; glasses dripping, you took them off and put them on the seat in the pair.

"You're in big trouble now," you said. Your knees came up into a cannon ball. I had enough time to take two strokes to the dock, so when you came up, I was sitting on the dock.

"You brat," you said when you saw me waiting.

You gave me your hand to get help out of the water. Even with the cold of too-cold water, your skin held its tan from summers out west, in the Canyonlands, in the Grand Tetons, the desert. The water rushed down the T-shirt, rounding your breasts.

You stepped into my arms. The hug was water to water.

"There," you said, "in case you weren't wet enough." Stepping back and shaking your hair in my face, you wanted to be double-sure. I still felt the press of you on me.

A breeze turned our bodies to ice. We ducked down and stretched out on the warm planks of the dock and lay on our backs like we might make snow angels, with feet apart and arms away from our sides. But it was April, and the sun felt new.

Maybe it was a draft or a leaf. It was something covering my hand. Maybe a shadow. That something was your hand covering mine. I didn't move my hand in case your hand was a butterfly and flew away.

"Our Father," you said, "who art in heaven." Your words were slow and sure.

My eyes were the April sky. I was supposed to join in, but my mother was the last person I prayed with and back then I was four and held her hand at Mass.

"Hallowed be thy name," I said. The words were a tape recording, lines rehearsed. The words were goose bumps. But I warmed into the words.

We said the Lord's Prayer on a dock on the lake, a long ways away from Mount Greylock. The words were different with you lying next to me, praying together in wet T-shirts. Your hand on my hand, our words together, I let the sun into a place in my chest.

That place was the place for forever.

"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever," you said, but I didn't. That part wasn't the Catholic part, so I stopped.

"Amen," you said.

"Amen," I said.

This was the closest to forever I had come. The place in my chest where the sun had reached was a place that was now and always. We were bigger than this lake, our families, Mount Greylock in the distance.

"It's cold," you said, and you sat up. Your eyelashes did that thing they do: They made stars.

"Okay, then," I said and sat up, hugging my knees to my chest.

"Ready to row bow?" I said.

You grabbed your glasses, and I held the shell for you. We pushed off the dock. Never had you rowed behind me. Never had I stroked. We both sat in new seats.

It wasn't until the middle of the lake that we began to work together. Our blades at the catch, our feet pushing off, our hands nearly the same height, we found the rhythm we needed.

"You know what?" I said. The words sounded too loud over the slap of oars on water.

"I'm bad at bow?"

"Not bad."

"What?"

"I can't say it," I said.

"Breathe," you said.

The words I wanted to say were not on this lake. They were not passed in church through a mother's hand to a daughter's. The words were not a prayer. The words I wanted were about wanting, the opening in a chest, the loneliness.

"I love," I said. The oars pulled through the water. "This." My skin under the wet shirt shivered.

"I know, Taylor," you said, "I know what you mean." Your voice was sure, like flat water and a cox'n and all the crew behind you. But you didn't know.

The slap of the oars, the wheels of the seats up the slide, the breeze. In my chest there was a forever place. In all the world, there was no love bigger than this lake, us two, and the highest mountain in Massachusetts.