

**Too Small  
to  
Hold You**



**Kate Reavey**

## **Too Small to Hold You**

**By Kate Reavey**

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## *Abandon*

*after a line by Robert Francis*

Today, I abandoned all my other lives  
to go berry picking in the Sequim Valley. I rejoiced  
with the soft tug of each fruit  
as I held on  
and it let go  
of the branch.

Every few berries, I put  
a single one on my tongue  
and warm  
it dissolved  
abandoning juices, filling my mouth.

I stopped picking when my small bucket  
was full and walked back to the car,  
laughing aloud at the question my mother had asked  
when she last visited this farm: *Do you weigh us  
before and after picking, to check if we've eaten any?*  
The farmer's son was watching over the cash register.  
It turns out his father died the winter before.

*We just check your tongue, he said. Purple tongues  
are a real giveaway 'round here.*

And today, my fingers  
stained with juice, I call to him—  
*My tongue's a giveaway. Come see.*

I am full of life as he looks up,  
abandons the shade of the little hut,  
steps into the open light,  
and I half-expect him to break into dance,  
spin me through aisles and aisles of berries,  
color spilling from the bucket  
hung loose on my wrist.

## *Sound*

*for Bruce and Tracey*

It would be easy to describe  
the horse's flank—those thick,  
dark muscles invite metaphor  
and the word *flank* resonates  
with all that power of speaking  
something solid, something  
that can stand tall  
against our hands  
then gallop away.

And the Belly River Ranger Station,  
its cut logs holding us in—glaciers sloughing  
off granite above us and the Perseus showers  
falling the kind of fall we've waited for—  
loving the words *slough* and *shower* and *stars*.

Tomorrow, we will leave this camp,  
set out along the river on foot,  
yelling and singing to warn the grizzlies.  
This morning, the two of you climbed back into bed,  
letting us sleep,  
the smell of cinnamon rolls  
rising and seeping through cracks  
to tempt us,  
and I imagine you  
held each other close, as you do on these long  
summer mornings, letting nothing,  
not even sound,  
slip away.

## *Trading Posts*

I can see the rough gravel that brought us here—  
the way my mother's face winces  
with some of the deeper bumps  
and washboard grade of the road  
as storm clouds darken the upholstery  
and I take my sunglasses off.

It has been five months since she left my father,  
six since she last kneeled down  
on the padded kneelers  
of Our Lady of Victories Church.

We are searching trading posts,  
not looking for anything,  
but the flavor of dust,  
the smell of tobacco, old Pendeltons,  
scattered sage at the doors. We are two women.  
Alone.

\* \* \*

When my mother was twelve,  
the nuns told her she was tone deaf  
and asked that she mouth the words of the hymns,  
*let others sing.*

That she, silent, listening,  
should only move her lips.

I have my father's lips.

Small. Precise. Outspoken.

Hers silently wince and purse

as we cover the bumps

of McElmo Canyon Road, en route

to the next place

where we can hold clay in the palms of our hands,

saying, *Oh, a wedding vase.*

*Didn't you like that one?*

Some trading posts hold silver, dangling  
like a promise under glass,  
bits of turquoise, broad-brimmed cowboy hats,  
and coffee if you'd like a cup.

And there was the one on Hovenweep road,  
where an old man asked where we  
came from, listened, then left as we looked at old tools.

I wanted to follow him

find him,

say, *I'm sorry that I didn't talk more,*

*that I am afraid here,*

*twelve miles from water, fifty from a phone.*

But he was gone, and I could only imagine  
the cab of his truck  
full of music and one rifle  
strapped to the window.

\* \* \*

Today, we are tired as we stop  
at the smallest trading post yet.

The door is low and we duck our heads down,  
slip across the wooden threshold  
into a small cloister of blankets and beads.

The owner is a frail woman, knitting a child's sweater.  
She does this by habit, and my mother walks straight  
to the blankets, strokes them.

In the corner of the room a cobweb is caught  
by wind, and the clouds move on to the next town.

I buy my mother a Squirt,  
and for a moment we forget the silver and sage—  
listen to the fizz

of a grapefruit drink, rising like water  
from the dust of McElmo.

The taste of citrus is a miracle,  
and as coins clank  
on the counter

I hear notes—

believe my mother is singing.



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