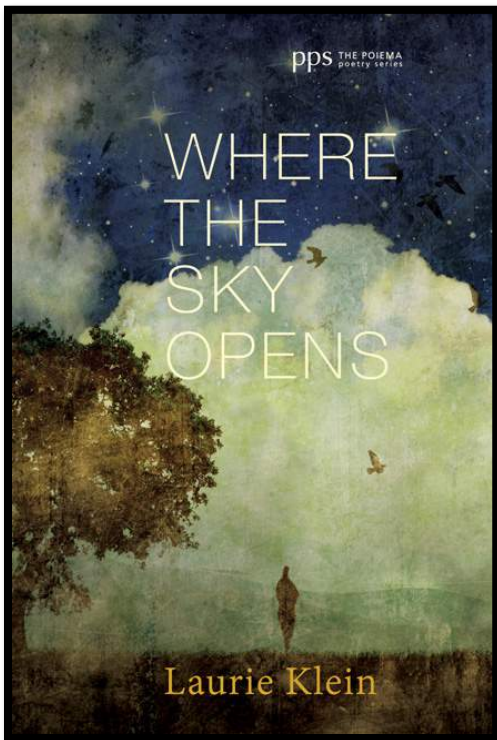


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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New Title from Laurie Klein
Where the Sky Opens: A Partial Cosmography



Love is ever mysterious. It begins in attraction or vocational passions held in common, or with a dream that seems it will come true if lived with the Other. There is a center, and all is well as long as it holds.

But what if the center alters? Can that love survive?

Laurie Klein's poems search for the answer through their sheer truthfulness of thought and feeling, after she and her journey mate lose their primary point of connection (a particular kind of faith and approach to faith that was embedded in everything they had and did).

One day the shared faith, and all that came with it, was there. And one day it was gone, the result of a combination of disillusionment with the promises of faith and thoughtfulness in a different direction (toward solitude and wilderness).

Loss moves between fear and confusion, anger, then wonder, and a possible key: the willingness to see the Other for who he really is and what he has truly found.

Through these poems, with their exquisite attention to detail. sound, and rich natural settings, Klein takes her own parallel journey into solitude and wilderness. And there, perhaps, hope for the future is born.

Laurie Brendemuehl Klein is the author of the prize-winning chapbook *Bodies of Water, Bodies of Flesh* and the classic praise chorus "I Love You, Lord." Her poems and prose have appeared in many publications, including *Ascent, The Southern Review, Atlanta Review, Terrain, The Christian Century*, and the *Holman Personal Worship Bible*. She is a recipient of the Thomas Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred. Connect with her on Facebook and at www.lauriekleinscribe.com.

Where the Sky Opens: A Partial Cosmography

by Laurie Klein

Cascade Books / Wipf and Stock Publishers

978-1-4982-3090-2/ paperback / \$13

www.wipfandstock.com

Interview with Laurie Klein

Why should people who don't read poetry take a chance on *Where the Sky Opens*?

People are busy. Most of my poems fit on one page. They're accessible. Visual. Readers may find the verbal luminance entices them down the page, along with the story line. Secondly, to thrive, we all need beauty and truth in our lives. Distilling language down to the essence of the experience evokes moments drenched with emotion, the real, raw stuff of life. Poems enlarge us, like those little cloth cubes that un-crimp in water and blossom into t-shirts. As the reader immerses in the poem's "moment" and travels with it, he or she hopefully ends up surprised, eased or troubled, inspired, or subtly changed in some way. Thirdly, most people relish a good story as an escape, an entertaining way to enlarge perspective and expand curiosity by entering the lives of others.

In *The Message* Jesus says, "I tell stories to create readiness in people." Specificity acts as a launch pad, propels the reader into the moment, the conflict, the minds and hearts of characters. Personal conflict points to collective experience. And there we are, together, weathering universal longings, aches, and aspirations.

Infusing a poetry collection with a running story line risks having the work being labeled confessional, or self-referential. Have you avoided this, and if so, how?

One cannot avoid the lens of one's life. I embedded the love story among odes to the wonders, quirks, and dangers of Nature as well as journey accounts of others, human and creaturely. Using third person and first person points-of-view also enlarges the experience. The two lead female characters—Bean, and sometimes "I"—keep bumping up against their faulty assumptions about partnership, commitment, themselves and their partners, the church and God. Relational suspense threads through the book. Rather than building steadily to a climax, there's a tidal rhythm here, common to relationship: Partners move closer together, withdraw, advance again. Good intentions surge, crest, wane.

How accurate is the science in these poems?

Working with interesting scientific facts gradually suggested to me parallels with human experience, giving me fresh angles and vocabulary I would not have otherwise chosen to explore wonder as well as human relationships. I've read that Franciscans believe we evolve spiritually by heeding and absorbing the Book of Nature, the words of Jesus and the Scriptures, and the Book of Experience.

Friends call me a wonder junkie. My schooling included the requisite Science requirements. My husband recently earned a degree in Geography and Geology. His top Bucket List item is seeing all our National Parks. Many of these poems sprung from geological, botanical, or zoological details I read about in National Park literature and park signage. Googling provided further resources. I find ongoing revelation everywhere within Creation. Tapping into wonder lightens perspective, transforms mindsets. To quote the old hymn "This Is My Father's World": *God speaks to me everywhere.*

Interview with Laurie Klein cont.

People are often defensive about their choices these days, especially when it comes to how those in the church view them. What prevents, or protects, divorced readers or those with non-traditional partnerships from feeling conflicted, or even judged, by the marriage described in your book of poems?

As individuals with free will, the stories we live and the stories we tell ourselves always ghost beneath the surfaces of our lives, decisions, speech, actions, and artistry. As the child of a broken home, I learned to tell when a person is done. Period. No more chances. I no longer carry judgments or bitterness about divorce. I believe most people do the best they can. I leave the parsing of motives and actions to God. As with all writings, how people interpret them is their choice. Fear, loss, survival, and love are universal.

You reveal Bean's inner struggle, yet only hint at reasons for Dreamer's crisis of faith. Why?

Parts of the unfolding conflict come from our history. Dreamer's story is not mine to tell. The vital discoveries being made in these poems address Bean's fear-based, faulty theology—which seems fairly common among some Christians. Bean not only grieves the loss of shared faith at the core of her marriage, she dreads eventual abandonment and infidelity. She expects calamity. Divine retribution. She's an ideal candidate for God's school of mercy.

How do you answer those who would pigeonhole Dreamer and Bean as "unequally yoked"?

There are no guarantees when two ardent believers marry that shared faith and ministry will continue until death—no matter how hard they try, how much they pray. People change. I view our covenant as binding. Choosing to respect each other's diverging beliefs has tested us sorely; it has also deepened our commitment. Yes, it's wrenching, confusing, scary, and frustrating. Sometimes it's sad, sad, sad. At the same time, we've each healed in many ways through the process. Our marriage today is real and vibrant and wondrous to us. We do hard things. And sometimes we dance.

How autobiographical are Dreamer and Bean?

As a reader and a writer, I find that characters who stand up and cast a shadow on the page (and the reader's soul) are composites: parts of the writer's experiences and imagination plus those of other people she knows, imagines, or observes. Our stories don't match exactly; they do intersect. When I'm working honestly, I write toward what I don't yet know via where, and who, I currently am. As someone famously said, "I write to find out what I think." Parts of my story will always converge with any characters I create.

Are you a glass half-full or half-empty person?

I am a recovering Eeyore. About fifteen years ago I decided to be happy. I've been practicing "Learned Optimism" ever since—with varying degrees of success. Poems tied up in a tidy bow don't stay with me, or change me. Poems that haunt me, or pose a new question, poems that open outward, or more deeply inward, do. I try to write those kinds of poems. When I go for the quick and easy finish, my dear writing friend calls me on it. Every time.

Interview with Laurie Klein cont.

What a gift! These days I remind my alter-Eeyore that it takes stubborn hope to write poetry as well as publish it.

My sense is that poets command less respect in this culture than they do in other countries. Submitting work here means a lot of waiting, a slew of rejections, rare feedback, and little or no remuneration other than the joy of saying something as well as one can. For a while, Eeyore declared the proverbial glass flat-out empty. For a while I believed him. I stopped submitting work, even tried to stop writing for a couple years. That didn't last. For me, writing is one way to track the steps I take as well as the stumbles. Keep a record like this fills me up, adds meaning to life.

How do you develop an idea into a poem?

I usually begin with a vivid image. Something I read or see arouses my curiosity. I do a little research. I pray sight will turn into insight. Sometimes I leave the idea alone for a while, wait for it to find its voice. I'm almost always surprised at where the poem wants to take me. Often the initial image and its corresponding lines—which I love!—drop away by the final version, no longer needed. Like the sill of a doorway, the image ushered me into a new room. Fully inhabiting that room means moving into it, or through it, sometimes into thin air, leaving the threshold behind.

What are you working on now?

I'm investing wholehearted attention in building our marriage, loving our kids and grandsons, blogging at lauriekleinscribe.com, giving readings, and offering workshops. I'd like to create a chapbook using the lead poem in this collection: "How to Live Like a Backyard Psalmist." I've written a lot of poems about my mother, brother, and father-in-law and their fierce battles with cancer, mental illness, and dementia. Another folder bulges with poems about the impact of war on families, including my own. When the time is right, some of these plus new poems may coalesce.

An Excerpt from *Where the Sky Opens* cont.

No one leads the singing as you did, love.
No one else intuits my pulse
and impulse, improvising
new settings befitting

the inner lark.

Old friends ask about you, tender
their prayers. I am counting on this:
how greatly you're loved,
and the kingdom emerging
in guises we never knew.

De Profundis

Poor sand dollars—
low tide and pillaged by gulls
on a jag—every shell
beached. Raw,

as we are. Shaped for the breath,
edges have slits
fine as buttonholes.
Noonday's stun of beaks
collapse the central star, (continued, next page)

(continued, new stanza)

and five tiny doves
fall from its heart, as if
pieces of heaven
salt this desolate shore.

Torn, yet tacking
my haphazard way
through the incoming chop,
come, let me be
an ark for your sorrow.

Reflex murmurs a new name
for those who hold open
a space for another, each
entrusted with God's silence.

St. Kevin's Blackbird

Outstretched in Lent, Kevin's hand
did not expect
the blackbird's egg, its speckled warmth,

new-laid, in his uplifted palm. Think prayer
as nest: an intimate travail whereby
fledgling hopes, like birds, leave behind

a kind of grave. Amen, seeming
premature, the saint-in-waiting
dovetailed faith with knuckles.

And afterward, did he save those eggshell bits,
adorn his windowsill with each goodbye
the smallest beak ever made?

He never said. Nor will he
know these hearts of ours,
more shell than shelter,

as they fissure, let in light enough (continued, next page)
(continued, same stanza)

for Christ to enter. Yes,
let grief be, with every breath, a readied womb.

Where the Sky Opens

At Sea World, do you remember?—
the trainer barebacks that killer whale,
her neoprened knees a vise.
Two creatures submerge, as one,
then breach, rocketing skyward,
a blitz of liquid silver and aquamarines,
scattering, like a broken choker.

Whose throat doesn't swell every time
perfection marries daring—her swan dive
off that treacherous nose! Glory

An Excerpt from *Where the Sky Opens* cont.

christens the crowd, as if atoms
left over from Paradise throb on, as if
old Adam arose, then fell
again. Naming us all.

And who can forget Eden, glimpsed?—
or how, for every gesture ascent makes,
the heart ignites a strobe, a Roman candle,
a diadem.

One prayer to agree on:
in the name of our first whale,
may we transcend gravity,
leap—fireworks, between two worlds.

Praise for *Where the Sky Opens*

“In *Where the Sky Opens*, Laurie Klein poses an implicit question of location. As it turns out, that sky opens in the reader’s heart, crossed by flights of love and loss in poems that sing like red-winged blackbirds on the edge of a northern marsh. With a deftness of image and patience of faith, the poet reminds us to ‘let grief be, with every breath, a readied womb.’”

—Paul J. Willis, author of *Say This Prayer into the Past*

“Klein’s first collection of poems is a glorious hymn of praise, inviting us into intimacy with things both known and unknown, earthy and sublime. Her language lifts you from the page into a poetic reverie and deeper reverence for life.”

—Christine Valters Paintner, author of *The Artist’s Rule: Nurturing Your Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom*

“What sinewy, mature poems these are, dynamic and packed with color! Klein’s lines zero in on her life’s crucial details that then enlarge, resonate, and fill the frame of the reader’s imagination. Dig in. Enjoy. This poet knows her way through words to things too vital to ignore.”

—Luci Shaw, Writer in Residence, Regent College, Author of *Scape* and *Adventure of Ascent*

“I cannot remember the last time I read a poet with such burly, thrumming, love-addled music—dense and real and salty and singing, adamant and muscular and sharp. Read any three of these poems and you will be more awake, which is what the best poetry is for. This book is that kind of poetry.”

—Brian Doyle, author of *Mink River*

“In her debut collection *Where the Sky Opens*, Klein invites us, her ‘journey mates,’ to encounter a world more beautiful, complex and fragile than we often expect at the beginning of our faith histories. From the natural wonder of toads and lichens and mountain trails to the “wild, savory, perilous, graced” marriage relationship, these poems illuminate a sensitivity to life’s lights and shadows through some of the most lush and visually intricate language I’ve read in years. Klein does not only write about, but through the loss of faith—and the love that redeems it—in ‘the kingdom emerging in guises we never knew.’”

—Tania Runyan, author of *Second Sky*

