



Lost in the Familiar

Lost in the Familiar

Suzanne Kathleen Cook

Lost in the Familiar

Suzanne Kathleen Cook

Copyright 2004 by Suzanne Kathleen Cook

I would like to thank all of the people who made this book possible: Professor Gerald Costanzo for his advice and guidance in writing the poems; the faculty of Carnegie Mellon's English and Creative Writing Departments for their input and understanding as I completed this project; Joseph Dicey, Carnegie Mellon School of Design Letterpress Lab, for consulting with the planning, layout and production of my book. This book is dedicated to all of the people I love.

DOUBLE DACTYL FOR TIPPER

Piddlin' Paddilin'
Big Stan the Man Zarnoch
Went to the White House one
Fine sunny day.

Touring the building when
Dozens of hooded men
(Antipolitical)
Blew him away.

REFORMATION

Take your Jesus and go—
he never remembers
to put down
the seat.

He ruined my party—me
and the Antichrist
drinking tea
and eating finger sandwiches.
Cucumber is her favorite.

She's getting on now—
not her usual feisty self;
although I hear
she's still good in bed.

She tells me about her past,
and I tell her
I've never heard
those stories before.
The history books never get the story right.
The Bible is a fairytale.
It's typical though,
when a bunch of men
write to preach their religion.

*There is nothing she said.
No heaven or hell—
there is only
dirt
and grit
and life.*

GROWING THOUGHTS

In the garden by a waxy leaf grows
Instant flora from a box. Who needs organics?

Sometimes, my heart rains worry from behind a
shadowbox because
Someone forgot to water my pride. It burns.

No one to travel the maze of my thoughts
No time to water the hedgerow.

Lately the insects have taken over
Late at night, munching on foliage.

My hand encases gritty earth,
My eye wanders over brown rock

While my garden spade slices the soil.
While I sing myself unaware

I see a ladybug traveling through the air,
I watch it until it stops on a nearby tulip
bud . . . a vacation.

Just a little thing to take me away from
Just another day of toil, how could it not? However,

Nothing breaks the hold my thoughts keep over me,
tight,

Nothing but maybe the flying insect. When I look
for it, it is gone.

SUMMER DAYS

I remember
summer in West Virginia
on my grandfather's farm.

Running through the field
with its dancing hay,
its symphony of insects,
the faint hint of clover and apple trees in the air,
and the deer darting gracefully into the woods,
I remember the sky, an open blanket for patchwork
clouds.

I remember the summer nights
catching fireflies
and chasing the cows in the pasture
careful not to step in their pies
listening to the crickets sing
and hiding from darkness in barns
crawling over haystacks;
itchy with delight.

NIGHTTIME IN THE CITY

As I lie awake
watching my candle
kiss the breeze
it hypnotizes me
with its caress;
it massages the night air
with its burning lips
as its tongue licks
the wind.

I look out my window
and see an old oak
embrace the ground,
gracefully swaying in the breeze
and holding its arms
up to God, surrendering its sins.

And in its branches I see
a nest of raw
mouths screaming
with lust and greed,
knowing nothing
else; their mother
returns to them
and supplies the fix
they crave.

AUTUMN ON THE COAST

I flash
through crumbling
streets.
My cherry Mustang burns
like a pulsing vein
of lightning,
scarring the pensive sky.
I swing by your house,
but it fades and peels—
a forgotten shell
on the beach.

I roll away
remembering
summer nights—
peeping the waves
kiss the lips
of the sand
and tearing
the silent night
with our moans.

I slow at the pier
and feel the wind
licking my skin
just as it did
the day you said
goodbye.

SNACKING ON GRAPES

She strokes a bunch with her hand,
Red, smooth, nearly bursting
With their juices.

She takes one into her mouth
And sucks slippery skin.

AFTER

after Mark Halliday

After the rain,
after my yellow tulip sprung from out of the ground,
after I found you lying naked on the wet sand of
the beach,

after I waited
while you biked across Europe,
after my empty hand grasped at falling leaves

and by and by your chocolate lab ran away
when I asked when the birds would be returning for
spring
and after I sang "Putting the Damage On,"

after my quiet whisper tickled
"I never was a cornflake girl,"
after you licked my neck in the moonlight,

and later on I said "A girl needs a gun these days"
after the rattlesnake bite,
after D Plan and "What Do You Want Me to Say?"

and after your hand brushed against my hair the
last time you said goodbye
and after Sunny Day Real Estate in the Ohio parking
lot
and Soul Coughing on your bedroom floor,

later, when you tore at the screen of my window,
later, when words were no longer enough,
I had no more tears.

MEMORIES

A wrinkle in time.
That's all it takes
To break a heart.

A wrinkle in time.
Now I'm standing here
With my heart half-torn.

THE GARDEN

She died, and I strolled along her side yard,
the browning shore she created with years of
her toil.

My mother walked beside
me, but she could not see
the waves of violets
as they crashed through the
yellow & red-striped daylillies,
or the vibrancy of every
flower she ever loved
with her two hands.

As we walked I saw
how the marigolds stood
like yellow microphones
singing of sorrow & loss.

The impatiens bore pink & white
petals chiding the summer breeze—
they always live up to their name.

Insects loved her, for her work
built a world for them,
dining on pollen
& bathing on lush greens.

Here the odor of decaying
mulch mingles with the sweet
nectar of the morning glories
and the lingering scent of her rubber gardening gloves.
I waded into the sea of color,
careful not to cause a tidal wave
of falling petals as I walked. Then I found
a spot among the pansies and lay down in their soft
embrace, saying goodbye to my mother
for the last time.

ON THE LAST TIME I KISSED THE WATER . . .

Swimming underwater hides my crying,
Running water cleans impure tears—
Floating up is as close as we come to flying.

Sorrow makes me question my trying,
Why have I struggled through treacherous years?
Swimming underwater hides my crying.

I dread everyday—my soul is dying,
Reaching the peak on my mountain of fears;
Floating up is as close as we come to flying.

When I speak, ears around me hear lying
And they, in turn, glare with fierce sneers;
Swimming underwater hides my crying.

I look at my life and the time I'm not buying
Thundering words pound inside my ears
Floating up is as close as we come to flying.

Thoughts in my head whisper like sighing
And tattoo my brain with white-hot sears;
Swimming underwater hides my crying,
Floating up is as close as we come to flying.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

For one brief
moment she tasted
forbidden fruit,
wrapped her
tongue around it.
Hot.
Sticky,
Seductively sweet
as its juices
dripped
down her chin.

Burning lips
ignite her own.
She does not stop
them—she always wants more.
Rough hands cascade
the curves
of her body.
Kisses,
like small
wet snowflakes, fall
upon her skin.

It ended.
Her heart stolen
the moment
he penetrated her
with his gaze.
He disappeared
and she walked away with nothing
but the bittersweet taste
of the forbidden fruit
she craves.

LOVESONG
(FOR THE WOMEN OF MARSHALL COUNTY, WV)

Hit me.
Watch me, silhouetted against red sky.
Breathe in
The darkness.

Watch me, silhouetted against red sky.
As rain hits your skin, making steam,
The darkness
Masking your hands.

As the rain hits your skin, making steam
You look to the ground for a reason,
Masking your hands
From my eyes.

You look to the ground for a reason
To lie down and sleep.
From my eyes
You are lost.

To lie down and sleep—
It's not worth the effort—
You are lost
Again.

It's not worth the effort.
Run to the night
Again.
In your pain, you are alone.

Watch me, silhouetted against red sky.
Hit me
Masking your hands.
Hit me.

TRAVELING MUSIC
after Billy Collins

A pleasant distraction,
driving in my Chevy
with Tori Amos by my side,
her voice wafting through the cab
and out the window to freedom,

as if we were a duo
on this road trip to nowhere,
the dirt road drifting towards the sky,
a dog meandering along the side of the road,
prospecting for feast of abandoned garbage.

Pure contentment is what
I feel as the sensual woman
moans her words
and massages the keys
of a piano—fast, then slow—
like a dance, or sex.

Soon we are joined
by Jeremy Enigk
and his mournful wail
sends shivers down my spine—
the perfect compliment
to his violent guitar strumming.

Around the next bend
Robert Smith thumbs
for a ride. Of course I
pick him up; he is
my favorite love song.

The music fills my ears
and I could drive all night
with my motley crew
of yelling rebels as we listen to
a live version of "Guitar and Video Games"

and all I can say to my passengers,
the fire-haired woman in the emerald dress,
the ebony-haired man wearing cherry lipstick,
who lose themselves in their emotions
all I can say is look up

and listen because the four of us,
with our intermingling voices
are about to glide over a covered bridge
and then, when we are ready,
jet from Atlantic to Pacific,

the compass is pointing
to the direction of the
girl in a convertible the color of strawberries
as she follows the path of the sun.

MY SONG

He-he-HE-HAW
they said to me
when they saw where
I was from—a country girl
in the country sun.

Howdy howdy how'd they
get so many animals
in such a tiny spot?
And where are all the people?

Nothing but the cows mooing.
Nothing but a clichè
of what you think the country is.
Nothing for me here.

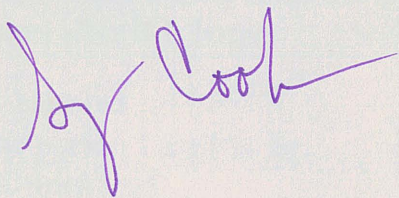
Why can't I
get away from the smell
of Angus shit in August heat?
Why does a cow lick
the blood and mucus from her calf
minutes after it is born?

I am haunted
by the person I used to be,
small town girl
on her way to nowhere.
No white knight to save me—
I had to save myself.

Listen to the trumpets
salute me.
Listen to the chickens
sing my praise.

This book was made for a Carnegie Mellon University College of Humanities and Social Sciences Senior Honors Thesis project. It was designed, handset, and letterpress printed at the Carnegie Mellon School of Design Letterpress Lab in April 2004. The image used was scanned from an original photograph and electronically printed. Spectrum was used for the textface with all headings set in Helvetica, and Univers used for the dedication and colophon. For the book's covers, I used Neenah 80 lb. Indigo and Bluestone, as well as 80 lb. Fox Silver Sparkles; the text paper is Neenah 24 lb. Classic Laid Writing in Antique Gray. A Vandercook number four proof press and acrylic Reflex Blue were used for the printing of all handset type.

This book is number 4 in an edition of 100.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jay Cook". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.



