

A Welcome Shore

Also by the author:

The Roar on the Other Side
A Guide for Student Poets

Sketches of Home

What a Light Thing, This Stone

Weather of the House

A WELCOME
SHORE



Suzanne Underwood

RHODES

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*To Wayne,
my true love*

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To the Lord, my Heavenly Muse, whose gift of words gives great joy.

FOREWORD

It is an ongoing wonder when a writer is able to infuse her prose with such poetic quality and tenderness that each piece becomes a poem in itself. Suzanne Rhodes has this magical facility of seeing to the heart of things, so that in her brief narratives each little hook for the imagination is a small pixel that adds to the whole and, in an observation, makes of complexity a simplicity that sticks in one's mind. She paints color and texture with words so that it all adds up to such a truth that I wonder why I hadn't come to the same conclusion on my own, in a similar circumstance.

But of course, no circumstance is identical to any other. Even the following day—same time, same place—the wind will have risen or the clouds have cleared, or a tight bud has just unfolded.

To retain the precision of the moment, one has to be there to experience it. Suzanne is a friend who takes my hand and says “Look!” or “Listen!” or just “Stay here with me while the meaning of this beauty unfolds.” It's in that particularity and specificity of Rhodes' seeing and speaking that a comparison with Mary Oliver's writing becomes consistent in my mind. Both have eyes wide open for beauty and the significance of earthy things like shorelines and sedges, shells and what Suzanne calls “the slow simmer of time.”

FOREWORD

Her subjects include things like the miracle of the human hand, the tang of a marinade, how improvisational prayer is, a horse-shoe crab, or the weight of wetness on a morning tent. And much, much more—each sample a small slice of a life lived well, in which we are invited to join, powerfully moved, weeping or rejoicing with the writer.

LUCI SHAW
Bellingham, Washington

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SHORELINE

A GLIMPSE

It's 8 a.m., and I'm driving to work in my aging Buick station wagon, feeling displaced among the faceless cars. Before this life on the expressway, I lived in a town with a view of mountains, with neighbors of many years, with time to walk on land. Now I live close to an ocean that calls to my depths, but I spend hours on asphalt traveling to and from work and driving my daughter, Emily, all over creation. It's disheartening, the endless blocks of oversized stores, the blazing traffic. Everything is altered following a divorce. Moving away from all my connections, I live in a smothering fog. I picture myself as a goat in a fairy tale, caught in a sack.

Something catches my eye—a glint of water by the road. Like a secret within the marsh grass stands an egret, holding its curve against the deafening rush of time.

• • •

It's Wednesday and I've called in sick. I struggle to get out of bed. Can't eat or sleep. Objects make me nauseous—the door knob, the clock. The floor frightens me with its sloping and shining. Fragments and images swim through my head—Gregor the beetle stuck on his back, waving his extremities; Zelda Fitzgerald

painting her strangled flowers. I spend the day crying. I tell God over and over what I tell him. I call my sister. She orders me to see a doctor, fearing I'm close to a breakdown. I obey. The doctor prescribes medicine. Over time I find my foothold.

• • •

I have a new friend named Wayne who rides to the beach with me. I like his dry humor, Texas accent, crinkly eyebrows. We ride our bikes past the fishing pier to the inlet at the boardwalk's end, then all the way to the other end where the hotels stop and the homes begin. I feel the ground beneath the wheels. I smell the salt-washed air. I like glancing back and seeing he is there in his red fleece and cap, with the sky and sea as background. It's all I need, a glimpse, a momentary shelter.