



Cherry Blossoms

Written by Topaz Winters

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“Cherry Blossoms” is the most popular poem in my first book, *Heaven or This*: a piece about sunrise, about spring, about love despite cruelty & storm, about holding a moment of tenderness as a talisman against the darkness.

Cherry Blossoms

from Heaven or This (2016)

we are holding hands in the barrel of a gun.
 i am searching the briar patch for something other than
 apology, and she hands me cherry blossoms
 in the shape of defiance. she ties me in forget-me-(k)nots.
 steals the wind from the tornado. casual kleptomaniac,
 even as they yell blasphemy, yell soul sick bone deep
 wrongness. there is no story where two girls
 get a happy ending. She tells me, *fine, we'll write it ourselves*,
 sings the beginning in the poetry of sunrise,
 and I can't help but dream of the wildflower epiphany
 of *maybe things will be okay after all*.
 i want to be the colour of the honeysuckle in her eyes.
 how terrifying it must be to be so soft. how beautiful
 to be so luminous. she touches me like spring cleaning,
 calls me raindrop, robin, rosebud, river song.
 ignores the ones yelling sacrilege, yelling hurricane.
 she tells me, *love is the most beautiful natural disaster*,
 and for the first time, my tsunami heart believes it.
 we are holding hands in the barrel of a gun.
 they pull the trigger, but when she is kissing me
 only cherry blossoms come out.

Reading it four years after publication, I'm struck by how little revision the initial poem underwent. It was written very much as a stream-of-consciousness work, which holds its own shade of beauty—but I wanted to focus in the revision on excavating

more intentionality, to insist that every word and phrase and line break exist for a specific reason.

Cherry Blossoms (II)

revision, 2020

we are holding hands in the barrel of a gun
i search the briar patch
for more than apology but kiss me now —

she hands me cherry blossoms the colour
of defiance *you tie me in forget-me-(k)nots*
harvest wind from tornado, you, casual
kleptomaniac steal their voices yelling
soul-sick-bone-carved blasphemy i know

there is no story where two girls
get a happy ending so fine,
we'll write it ourselves

sing the beginning in the poetry of sunrise

her voice a means of survival
the wildflower epiphany of *maybe*
things will be okay after all

— i want to be the honeysuckle in her eyes
how terrifying is it to be so soft
how beautiful to be so luminous

she touches me like spring cleaning

say raindrop say robin rose
bud river song, sacred beyond
the ones yelling sacrilege hurricane,

say love is the most beautiful natural
disaster until my tsunami heart believes it,

say we are holding hands in the barrel of

a gun I am searching the briar patch

say they pull the trigger *kiss me,*
kiss me now & only cherry blossoms

come out —

Perhaps the most noticeable revision I made was to the structure of the piece. In keeping with the stream-of-consciousness style, the original draft is a single stanza with chiefly intuitive line breaks, but in the revision I tried to create more space for individual lines to breathe. There are certain lines that I've found myself holding onto in the past four years & certain lines that readers have told me over & over deeply resonate with them. Those lines felt important enough to give their own stanzas, or to set apart such that they could exist as distinct moments while simultaneously contributing something vital to the whole of the piece.

There's also more literal white space on the page in this version. In the original poem, thoughts are largely organised into full sentences & precise grammar — but that form felt restrictive as I reread it, so I decided to break up many of those sentences in favour of splinters & defamiliarisation. The nature of fear, I think, is much like the nature of love & the nature of wonder in that I have never experienced it as a flow of coherent thought but rather as singular & fragmentary images that nonetheless make up something greater than the total sum of their parts. Every line in the revision is there for a reason, & that doesn't necessarily mean that every line builds to the same narrative finish or that the purpose of the poem is to put forth an individual narrative at all.

More shifts in this revision included bringing the address of the piece to an even split between the second & third person, where the original version uses only the third person. This comes back to the impulse to dissociate from a continuous storyline & allow a more kaleidoscopic vision of love to emerge. I also removed nearly all of the punctuation as a way to return to the roots of the stream-of-consciousness style of the piece.

This revision, I believe, is about holding the tension of the subject matter (love despite bigotry, tenderness despite cruelty, fear despite hope) alongside the tension of how I as a poet have grown since the original poem was published, & the tension of what this work means to me versus what it has come to mean to thousands of people I will never know. It's a process of creating space for something that reminds you as you

read it that you are alive — because an integral part of the rewriting of this poem was the reminder that I am indeed still alive.