

To Embroider the Ground With Prayer

Teresa J. Scollon

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In Teresa J. Scollon's opening poem, "The Invitation," she carries readers into a gentle night of watching stars as a young child with her parents: "When I awoke, I was already in her arms." From this gentleness, she travels into the struggles of leaving home and finding one's way back, a journey so pertinent throughout this collection. "But the stars still and always / live there," she writes, and, in language that burns with sensation, "The way ginger / lights the inside of my mouth, / I carry that night." *To Embroider the Ground with Prayer* is a book of creation, and each of Scollon's poems reveal how an entire life can be wrapped in a moment, as fleeting or simple as it may seem.

Part of the Made in Michigan Writers Series, Scollon's first book-length collection contains the stories of her family, particularly through her father's sickness and death. These poems, though, are as much about the family that a community makes, and the stories of small town folk in rural Michigan are woven into this collection as reliably as neighbors dropped in for coffee in an age gone by. A rich vein of humor runs through these neighbor poems, and Scollon proves her ability to accurately present unique ways of speaking, and to mine stories for both their sadness and delight. In "July Fourth," in which her dying father is asked to appear in the village parade, Scollon presents a true marriage of place, community, and family. "It was good / for us to see you. It was good for you to hear us / calling to you. It was good for all of us / to smile and wave and heal each other / for that mile and a half of public sun."

Every one of Scollon's poems is interwoven with intimacy—with every detail revealing that love of knowing. In "Drought Year," which tells of when her father first fell ill, Scollon writes: "the tractor's heat and drum, the tense muscle-focus / as the row end approaches, / hard left steer into a teardrop turn, definite pull / to raise the planter." The exactness of her detail is spellbinding, and she transfers that knowledge at the end of the poem. Her father, with his arm out the truck window on a drive past the corn fields, feels "the rain bead on his arm, *that loved arm*." The last poem in the collection, "The Garden," ends with the image of her parents "sitting on the deck in the evening light, his arm / around her shoulders. They are so small, sitting there. / He is telling her to keep the house. He is showing her / the garden they made, teaching her to see paradise." From the first to the last page of *To Embroider the Ground with Prayer*, readers are wrapped in moments that show us the way to love.

JENNIFER FANDEL (Spring 2012)

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