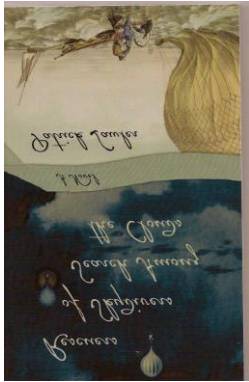


**RESCUERS OF SKYDIVERS SEARCH AMONG THE CLOUDS**  
(University of Alabama Press, 2012)



**FIRST CHAPTER FROM RESCUER OF SKYDIVERS SEARCH AMONG THE CLOUDS**

**MY MOTHER  
WALKED DOWN JOY  
BOULEVARD. MY  
FATHER WAS A  
BEE-KEEPER.**

That year the mayor decided to name the streets after presidents who had been assassinated. He was never satisfied. According to him a town's character was written across it in the names of its roads. Once the streets were named after berries, so we walked down Choke Cherry Lane or Elderberry Road or Raspberry Way. These names gave us places to live our lives. Girls could be lusted after on Strawberry Street. Boys could smoke cigarettes, watching clouds of hair from the corners of dark red/blue intersections. The mailman would lug his bloated bag down Boysenberry. Places for estrangements and entanglements. Places to meet people or leave people. The mayor made a conscious effort to select the edible berries though some poisoned ones slipped in—which led him to go with the assassinated president idea.

When I was born they named the streets after emotions: my mother walked down Joy Boulevard. My father was a bee-keeper. Almost robotic among the bees with his smoke pot and his bee clothes, almost feminine with his netted face. I spent my childhood with bee stings. My mother was a hagiologist studying saints. My sisters would spend afternoons digging for relics in the backyard. The bees were ambassadors from an ordered and enchanted world. They were scholars obsessed with an ideal, always returning to the same roundish, yellow perfection of their lives. Flying alchemists. I know they were important doing their honey dances. I loved and hated them at the same time.

It was impossible to tell whether we lived in the sky or lived in the earth.

All the while, I practiced magic tricks. It was the only time I wasn't afraid though I wasn't very good at making things disappear. But I'd call the family together and I'd try hard to make things invisible. It became apparent that I needed practice. My oldest sister played church music. Every day after school this God-sad music would drown the house.

Every Thursday we practiced fire drills. That was when the phrase "Whatever" was first used with its current connotation. I was in love with this girl in my class. I lived for her, the sky of her eyes, her movement, her voice. I told her all this, and she said "Whatever."

I forgot to tell you we lived in the ground. A glass rain fell around the "house." One day I wrote a poem and my mother sprinkled holy water over everything. This was years before my brother became invisible. I didn't know that he had been secretly rehearsing.

It was impossible to tell whether we lived in the story or lived in the words.

My father asked us to practice fire drills. Every Thursday we knotted sheets together. We would crawl on all fours beneath the smoke from his smoke pot. We memorized the exits. We imagined the linoleum would go gooey with

the heat. We practiced breaking glass. One day I would make a list of all the people I didn't save.

My mother always felt something really good would happen. Years later my father became a bee sipping from an aluminum flower. Mostly we ate honey. My sisters came into the house with these tiny saint bones in their hands. I called the Family together for the Magic show. I didn't have a veil big enough.

It was impossible to tell whether we lived in the filled or lived in the empty.

That was the year they named the streets after the elements: I walked down Fire Lane. One day I would make a list of all the people I wouldn't save. My father was getting pissed because I wouldn't write the book. I just said I didn't have anything to write about. Would you come to live on my side of the moon? I said to the Whatever girl. I couldn't keep her from vanishing. During one of the fire drills my father made a fire from my poem. "This will make things more realistic," he said to the family. Then he turned to me. "Now you'll have something to write about." Nothing is as happy as it sounds. That was the year my mother felt certain she was going to win something. She would be cleaning the house for the day they would arrive with the prize. My older sister's music ate holes in the house. You see, nothing is as sad as it sounds.