

# *My Villages*

The Poetry of  
Carolyn Evans Campbell

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Other Books by Carolyn Evans Campbell

*Waiting for the Condor*

*Reflections of a White Bear*

*Tattooed Woman*

*Soiled Doves of Colorado and the Old West*

*A Fish Nobody Knew*

*Fireweed, a Woman's Saga in Gold Rush America*  
(an historical novel)

*This book is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### *My Villages, The Poetry of Carolyn Evans Campbell*

The villages created by Carolyn Evans Campbell in this absorbing book are places recollected from a lifetime's journey, the many moods and haunting images arising from authentic yearnings for a deeper knowing, one tracing back in the poet's words "to an ancient amniotic sea." Drawing from memories and enriched by the imagination, each village is a meditative aggregation of poems, some nostalgic and linked to childhood, others making connections to history and the Colorado prairie, including projections from previous lives layered with pathos and irony. Still other villages in the third and fourth sections are viewed through the lens of magical realism, dream-like narrative lyrics blending myth and ethnicities to achieve a heightened awareness of life's connections, as in the poem "I've Grown to Believe":

*I believe I can tango  
with nubile frogs  
and can ride the burnished sound  
of the cello into the stars.  
I can slip below the horizon  
in the afterglow of last light  
and meet everyone  
and everything  
I have ever believed in.*

Common to all these poems is a voice looking back through wise eyes. The reader will find none of the modern vice of egotism. Rather, they will enjoy poems written with an ironic self-awareness, moving both intellectually and emotionally, with such marvelous metaphors as "The Doll", "Following Eve", and "Red Sequined Shoes at the Top of the World". Carolyn Evans Campbell, who once

followed the flight of the condor upon the heights of Machu Picchu, is a rare poet with special gifts, as in the poem “The Doll’s Head.”

*I keep thinking about you.  
You’ve ended up in my treasure box,  
not gold, or gems, but stories,  
losses, thoughts of you  
no longer with eyes to see  
the vast beauty of a ribboned dawn,  
nor a mouth to tell your tale,  
sing your song –  
only one dainty ear to hear  
a mother’s keening  
in the haunted prairie wind.*

Dan Guenther  
Poet and Novelist

Author of *The Crooked Truth*, 2011 Colorado Authors’  
League Award selection for Poetry (Book)

*To Russ, my soulmate,  
in all of my villages.*

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## MONSTER SHOE

There were lonely summer days  
wandering my backyard, tracing  
my paths around low hanging shrubs,  
the coal-bin side of the house,  
the neglected rock garden by the garage,  
hot, empty days with no one about.

The alley held some hope of adventure –  
picking a hollyhock blossom,  
kicking a can, stealing a plum  
from the cranky lady's tree,  
finding a piece of colored glass,

and always an ant hill to destroy,  
watch the damned curl into a crushed ball  
or a crippled life end.

I was God on lonely summer days –  
Judgement Day for a colony of innocents.

I watched the every-which-way panic of ants  
the desperate digging in and out  
of their dying labyrinths and the long line  
of nannies carrying white bundles  
from the nursery, carrying the offspring to safety.

I did not know then  
about burned out villages and ghettos,  
mothers running to the woods carrying  
bundles of babies and terrified young ones,  
the march of monster feet through neighborhoods,  
incinerated victims curled and smoking in ashes.

Looking at the decimated ant hill,  
I imagined the underground alarm, the scramble  
to save the queen. I watched  
until I felt sorry for what I had done with my  
hateful Buster Brown monster shoe,  
too late to apologize to such a tiny creature  
simply living and breathing on a hot summer day.

## SYMPHONY OF LOVE

I am eleven.  
Lynette is six,  
already a sultry movie star, maybe  
Veronica Lake, alluring, not knowing  
she holds the mustard seed that one day  
will grow wild and hot. Her liquid blue eyes,  
unreadable, stare like she's looking  
at Humphrey Bogart. With soft bones  
she glides in invisible long slinky silks.

I'm chubby in faded blue jeans and tee shirts  
that stretch over disappearing baby fat  
and newly budding breasts.  
Lynette can sing. I can play the piano.  
Together we practice  
*Symphony, symphony of Love*  
*Sent from Heaven above*  
*You are my symphony...*

I believe I can make Lynette a star in Hollywood.  
We play the song over and over.  
*This time you must be louder on*  
*You are my SYM PHO NEE.*  
I teach her to sidle pigeon-toed  
around the room with one hand on her hip  
the other waving a hankie in the air,  
a glamorous touch I think.  
She lifts her head, raises her eyes  
to the heavens...*sent from Heaven above,*  
*You are my SYM PHO NEE.*  
I tell her to hold the note as long as possible.

I teach her to lean seductively on the piano,  
never removing her hand from her hip.

and tell her to look like she's in love.  
I teach her how to swoon,  
a nice touch, I think.  
It is July and we are getting better.  
Her voice flows from her throat  
like warm butterscotch pudding.

I dress Lynette in mother's creamy white  
satin night gown and grandmother's  
pink bed jacket with a lace collar.  
I brush her blond curls  
into a Betty Grable up-sweep  
and pin a large blue ribbon on top.  
Mother's rhinestone earrings, beads,

white gloves and high heels  
make a sophisticated touch, I think.  
Blue eye shadow, circles of red rouge and  
*Kissable Pink* lipstick are lovely.  
She's beginning to look famous.  
We need an audience. It's already August.

On Big Chief lined paper we announce  
*Symphony of Love*  
*Presented by the Lovely Lynette and*  
*Accompanist and Manager, C.C. Evans,*  
*Tuesday at 4 o'clock.*  
*Cookies and Kool-aid will be served.*

Only Eugene Schlotsky shows up.  
Lynette sings her heart out.  
*Is it over?* Eugene asks.  
*Of course! You are supposed to clap!*  
*Can I have my cookie now?* Eugene leaves.

Lynette tries not to cry.  
We sit at the piano bench  
and eat nearly all the cookies.  
Mother walks in with Mrs. Bowman  
and her cleaning lady.  
*Is the second performance about to start?*  
This is the big time! Three adults who applaud  
wildly at the end. We all eat cookies,  
sip the Kool-Aid and talk about our future plans.

*I found some other sheet music, mother says.*  
*I'm an Old Cowhand or My Old Kentucky Home.*  
*They're quite catchy.*  
*You could wear a cowboy hat.*  
But Lynette and I decide to stay with  
*Symphony of Love.*  
Summer is almost over and we need to practice  
if Lynette is going to be a movie star.

## THE DOLL'S HEAD

I found you poking out  
from the red prairie dust,  
only a shard of your white  
porcelain skull, a rounded cheek  
and one perfect shell pink ear.  
You were a baby doll held tightly  
by The Child traveling west  
to the land of milk and honey.

I keep thinking about you,  
your soft cotton body,  
porcelain painted feet and hands,  
a baby's long cotton frock,  
or perhaps a blue-checked gingham  
and matching bonnet like The Child's.

What happened?  
Were you left behind leaning against  
a rock sipping tea with the field mice?  
Did you fall off the wagon unnoticed  
and lay in the ruts, your painted eyes  
staring at the wide sky stars  
until coyotes scattered your limbs?  
Were you buried with The Child,  
the smell of the bloody flux  
clinging to you?

I keep thinking about you.  
You've ended up in my treasure box,  
not gold, or gems, but stories,  
losses, thoughts of you  
no longer with eyes to see  
the vast beauty of a ribboned dawn,  
nor a mouth to tell your tale,  
sing your song –  
only one dainty ear to hear  
a mother's keening  
in the haunted prairie wind.

## LAKE BOTTOM BURIAL

Beneath Georgetown Lake lies  
a mountain pioneer cemetery,  
the disrupted bones of disillusioned miners,  
children, a snowbound traveler, perhaps  
great-grandmother, consumptive and hollow.

Curious fish waver around the caskets  
dislodged in the silt, tilted, their lids open  
freeing the bones to mingle with other  
femurs, tibias, vertebrae.  
Tumbling along the bottom, rolling  
with the currents, the smiling skulls  
greet each other, good fellows, affable now.

Long hair, once tightly bound, unloosened  
floats with the lake grass, tangles  
in the brandy-colored shadows.  
A dancing toe, pivoting in the silt  
breaks off and moves downstream  
with the bottom feeders, into Clear Creek.

Now and then a fish hook snags  
a piece of once-white satin, the lining  
of a casket, a swatch of burial dress,  
a soft rose sash, a yellow hair bow,  
a white kid slipper.

A shaft of sun pierces the murky water,  
lights a flickering fish, a gold wedding band,  
a button, a watch fob, the latch  
on great-grandmother's tiny secret diary.  
Her long days have washed away –  
*Monday, feeling poorly...Thursday, cold,*  
*Monday, rainy...Friday, no one visits...*  
*Thursday...so tired...so cold.*

These bones don't mind the jumble  
in their watery world. They like the irony.  
Madam Belle's hip jostling Preacher Dyer's rib,  
The fish don't mind. Swimming in and out  
of eye sockets and open jaws is a diversion.  
No one above the lake minds as long as  
the fish keep biting.

But the villagers wonder about the whispers  
over the water, and the flowing mist  
that looks like hair.

## A LOVE STORY

We crawled out of the sea,  
wet, blinking,  
emerged from the mud  
to dry in the sun,  
lose our scales,  
fashion fur.

I hid under the leaves,  
watched you stand  
and stretch into a little god,  
listened to you  
sing forth the stars,  
open your great heart  
to roar back the thunder,  
and I followed you

rocking  
the seeds of civilization  
in my pelvis, pulling  
slippery golden grasses  
between my fingers,  
poking blossoms, open  
and red as mouths,  
into my hair.

In our night nest  
of crushed flowers, pollen,  
sweet minty leaves, and  
our pungent nakedness,  
the earth moved with  
my spread, my arch,  
my mount and moan,  
my salt,  
your salt,  
your surge,  
your silver trails.  
And when you slept  
like a sea snail coiled,



I listened  
to the ocean in you  
and the pulse of the universe  
in your chest.  
I ran my tongue and fingers  
over your landscape and  
and waited for the morning  
to strike you crimson.  
And I followed you.

I watched you capture  
the lightning in your fists,  
force the winding rivers  
into straight lines,  
carry the mountains on your back,  
tear them down stone by stone  
and erect them into monuments.  
When you cursed the elements  
for standing in your way,  
I trembled.

Hidden in the day  
and in the secrets of night,  
I watched you wail with the wind,  
leap with flames, chant  
the fire song, eat the earth,  
adorn yourself  
with red and ochre clay.  
I saw you silenced by the evening star,  
the night full of moon,  
the lift of loons off the lake.

I watched you swallow the sun  
and glow with its heat,  
and when you blew your warm  
breath around a frozen wren  
to spark it back to life,  
Oh, how I loved you.

## THE WOMAN FROM THE BARRIO

The woman from the barrio fooled us all.  
Nearly invisible tucked inside the cool  
shade of the doorway, she rocked  
a rag-bundled baby who sucked at her breast,  
and startled us with her arm outstretched  
across the barrier of shadow into sun –  
a golden arm, detached, suspended in light.

We always dropped a coin into  
her ghastly open palm, turned our backs  
against her blows of benedictions.  
It was a good system...  
until the policeman walked by.  
In one violent charge, he dragged her  
from the doorway, yanked the bundle  
from her breast and dashed it to the ground.

The woman from the barrio fooled us all.  
Not a baby, but a watermelon, split open  
spattering its pink juice, scattering sweet  
chunks of flesh that lay on the sidewalk  
like meaty blossoms.  
She picked up the battered melon,  
wrapped it in her shawl and ran down the street.

In a quiet place, we watched her try to fit  
the pieces together, bind it in the rags,  
gently wipe sticky juice from its green skull.  
She offered her breast, curled around the fruit,  
rocked and sang, rocked and sang,  
*Good little baby, hush little one.*  
The woman from the barrio fooled us twice.

## IN THE ZOCALO

(Oaxaca, Mexico)

When God made the wild things,  
surely he was singing,  
opening his great throat to free  
the fluttering skylarks, the scream  
of hurricanes and angry whores,  
the timpany of kettle drums,  
stomping feet and hallelujahs,  
the names of his children's children  
and all their shouts and serenades.

Little frog man, strolling minstrel  
with a lolling tongue, one bare foot  
and one blue sock, and eyes that look  
inward at uncluttered walls,  
thwangs a three-string guitar, tilts  
back his head, *Vida!* he sings,

*Vida! Vida! Vida! Vida!*

His only song, his only word.

So little changes in this old city—  
*Vida* everywhere, *vida*  
in the sticky cheeks of children  
*Vida* in the young girl sitting  
by the bandstand in Sunday silence,  
eyes lowered, Hail Marys still clinging  
to her lips like beads of honey,  
who dares not look into the face  
of the boy next to her, dares not  
feel the galloping ponies thundering  
in his chest, dares not eat  
the caramels he has placed in her lap.

It's all around and inside, *vida*—  
in the foamy coffee, swirling skirts and  
lemon sashes alive on the cathedral steps,  
striped candy suckers large as moons,  
the off-key band leading brassy soldiers  
trumpeting pigeons into the air,  
*mariachi* singers flashing midnight smiles,  
stirring up sobs in blue-haired tourists.

*Vida! Vida! Vida! Vida!*

*Vida!* He sang, and all the little hearts  
of wild things pumped and sprang to life.

*Vida!* he sings,  
while the balloon man floats by grasping  
a blossom of balloons, his toes  
just skimming the cobblestones.