



GIRL AT THE END OF THE WORLD

ERIN CARLYLE

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ERIN CARLYLE'S GIRL AT THE END OF THE WORLD

considers the complex grief of a parent lost to Opioids. The speaker works through her father's death with a sharp focus on place, expanding into the realms of science fiction and mythmaking.

RELEASE DATE: 09.17.24

PUBLISHER: *Driftwood Press*

ISBN: 978-1-949065-33-6

FORMAT: Paperback

PRICE: \$15.99 USD

GENRE: Poetry Full-Length Collection

PAGE COUNT: 79

CONTACT: editor@driftwoodpress.net

DISTRIBUTOR: Ingram & Asterism



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Growing up in rural Kentucky and Alabama, **Erin Carlyle's** poetry often deals with the intersections of place, poverty, and girlhood. While poetry is her first love, she also enjoys film and music, and is an avid record collector. She teaches English and Georgia State University where she is also pursuing her PhD in Creative Writing. She lives in Atlanta, GA with her husband, two cats, and one dog.



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PAGE ONE

ADVANCED PRAISE

"In *Girl at the End of the World*, her second, full-length collection published by *Driftwood Press*, one of Erin Carlyle's speakers (an admitted shoplifter) asks, What must it be like/to be an honest girl?" It's a provocative question appearing in a book that with precision and unflinching, clear-eyed honesty explores (among other things) the difficulties of global warming/wildfires, poverty, violence against women, and the loss of a beloved but complicated parent to addiction. Loss and hardship thread through these hard-hitting, spare and beautifully rendered poems, poems that again and again prove the power of language to transform suffering into art."

– BETH GYLYS,
AUTHOR OF *AFTER MY FATHER: A BOOK OF ODES*

"It's hard/ to say if/ a crack/ in the sky/ can ever mend." In this captivating collection, Erin Carlyle confronts the specter of her own girlhood and relationship with her father and his death. Asking questions of origin, belief, memory, and absence, these formally dexterous and inventive poems explore how we see and understand ourselves, and what we may become, in the wake of trauma and loss. As the speaker confronts her domestic and ecological environments, she is a "little fish/ swimming/ back to the beginning." With an unflinching look at personal history and the "ruin" of the past, *Girl at the End of the World* develops a rich, compelling language to dramatize both grief and renewal. Ultimately, the speaker is a woman at the beginning of a new world, with the power to conjure her own future: "What grows after//all trees burn? What will be/ born here again?"

– JENNIFER MOORE,
AUTHOR OF *EASY DOES IT*

"Erin Carlyle's second poetry collection is a temporal triumph, blending the past, present, and future into a heartbreaking and hallucinatory exploration of a girlhood burdened by poverty and the bonds of familial love. These poems bear witness to the ends of many worlds, both public and private: the last kiss of a murdered friend, a community sundered by the opioid crisis, a father's ailing heart, the post-apocalyptic earth. In quiet, luminous lyricism, these elegies teach us about the lonely beauty of survival and dare to ask: 'What grows after / all trees burn? What will be / born here again?'"

– DANIELLE CADENA DEULEN,
AUTHOR OF *DESIRE MUSEUM*

LETTER TO THE READER

DEAR READER,

Let's start at the awful beginning. In August of 2019, my father died of an overdose after a long battle with opioid addiction. I got the phone call about his death when I was working in Buffalo, New York, nowhere near the place in Alabama where he and my mom had been living, and where he lay dying that day for an unknown number of hours before his body was discovered, motionless, empty. On the phone, I heard my mother crying. I heard paramedics picking up the body. My oldest brother tried hard to describe the scene, as I was crying and unable to fully grasp the meaning of his words. It was chaos.

I had secretly expected this phone call for years if I'm being honest. I thought about him dying even way back when I was a teenager, when his addiction first got out of hand. I'd imagine coming home from school and walking in on his body, and I have many teenage poems about this death fantasy. I expected his death. I thought about it often.

That fantasy couldn't capture the feelings that followed his real death. I handled everything for my mother and my small family. I helped her navigate the funeral process. I also carried his urn through security at the airport and on an airplane home with me. I traveled ten hours to bury him next to his mother in Kentucky. I physically put the urn in the ground. I did this all for a couple who, at times, barely fed and clothed me as a child. I did this for my dad who I loved deeply, who taught me so much about the world, but profoundly traumatized my brothers and I due to his addiction.

Soon after his death, the world was thrust into a global pandemic that cost me my job and forced my husband and I to move to California. I had never thought about the idea of a Fire Season before we moved to California. In the South, we get tornadoes and severe weather, but I've never felt the intense fear of smoke in the air, the sky orange and yellow above, and fires raging all around threatening to burn down the city. I was finally coming out of my grief haze, but in the smoke and ash all around us, ancient trees and delicate wildlife were losing their lives. All this death mixed together for me. After I lost my dad, the world burned around me and everyone else, and suddenly all these deaths existed on the same plane. We were all upended, struggling to weather a pandemic that had, at that point, killed almost a million people and caused others to feel a grief like mine. Meanwhile, corporations under the Big Pharma and Big Oil banners wanted to take our money, our land, and our lives, and they didn't care who they hurt along the way. This is why I began writing the collection of poems that would later become *Girl at the End of the World*.

LETTER TO THE READER

The poems in this collection go from moments where my father made desperate decisions to visions of the end of the world. The speaker then escapes through a dreamworld of her childhood books, and the book ends with a section where poems explore magical thinking and teenage witchcraft, poems that represent a desire for something spiritual, even though the truth is very mortal and organic. Death is the end.

Ultimately, the book is an exploration of the journey that grief can take a person on. While the end is somewhat ambiguous, the poems suggest that there could be something good, or at least something else born from all this destruction.

**THANK YOU FOR READING,
ERIN CARLYLE**

THE END OF THE WORLD

I'm sitting at a bus stop, waiting
to get a lift

to some other plane
of existence.

The trees in this town
used to sway, almost whisper.

Now they're too dry,
some dead, but I have a memory

of kissing a boy
under these oaks.

Clean, pastoral, we laid
down on the cool, soft earth,
and the earth was spongy, gave
under the weight of our bodies.
I know that there were other

trees here too:
Pine, White Ash, Silver

Maple, American Beech,
and it smelled old,

like dirt, the body
of the earth. The boy slid his hand

under my shirt and I sucked
in the air, filled

my lungs—fresh, but I stopped him
before heavy breathing,

made my hand
guide his hand

out into the crisp light
of day. I told him

it was too fast. I didn't get
a second date, never saw him again.

Now, I'm sitting here looking
at the burn and ruin trying

to breathe like that,
but it's too hard.

I want to give
up, and I don't think

there's a bus coming,
but there is a bird circling above.