



# Wild Juice

Poems

## ASHLEY MACE HAVIRD

In *Wild Juice*, the poet and novelist Ashley Mace Havird confronts global and personal change. Her subjects range from the extinction of a prehuman species to the present-day reduction in sea life due to the climate crisis. Closer to home, she confronts the death of her father and her own aging. Running throughout these lyrics of loss is the richness of communal life, a current of hope given substance by the juice of wild grapes that baptizes the poet's chin and that of her elderly father, whose presence haunts the book. Havird's poems move from sea coasts to the rural South to landlocked suburbia, in language characterized by wit, pluck, and ironic candor.

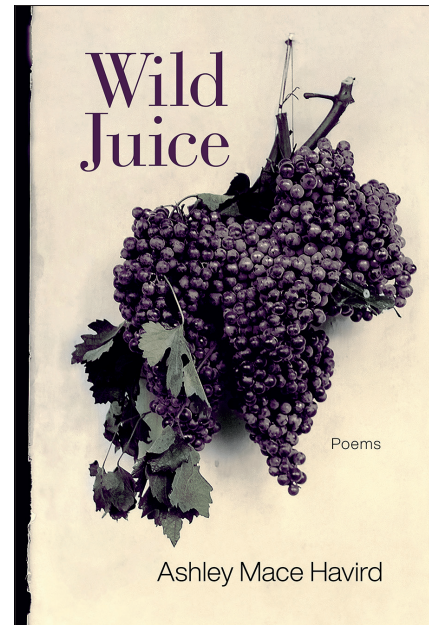
Through striking evocations of the natural world, conveyed in a voice steeped in mature human experience, *Wild Juice* speaks memorably on behalf of a life that embraces us all.

**ASHLEY MACE HAVIRD** grew up on a farm in South Carolina. She is the author of three poetry collections and a novel, *Lightningstruck*. Her poems and stories have appeared in *Shenandoah*, *Southern Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Ahead not scat but a spill of grapes.  
Limb overhanging, entwined—globe-heavy vine  
(stray seed rooted, climbed)—purple muscadine.  
I follow my footprints back, my cupped hands filled.  
*Smell them. My father hears with his eyes. Eat.*  
I mouth again: *eat*.

Wild juice baptizes our chins,  
and we are born again.  
My father's back straightens.  
The highway refuses the stray.  
Fingers grow sticky in bee-giddy arbors  
of girlhood. Left with what's left, we spit out  
sour pulp, bitter seed, crushed skin.

—from "Strays"



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## PRAISE FOR *WILD JUICE*:

“‘I go for a walk,’ Ashley Mace Havird writes, commencing one poem with a factual accounting that recalls the great story-teller Dickens and the equally great observer Thoreau. In *Wild Juice* she flexes her own distinctive, straight-ahead narrative skill by mixing her soulful sense of connectedness with a musician’s ear for the intricacies of speech, its richness, its idiosyncratic prospects. Hers is a fine-tuned kind of folk music, filled with family wisdom—spirited, playful, witty—but possessed of range that includes a sweeping catalog of subjects from Homo naledi (Star Man) to current-day hospice care, from the coming-of-age 1960s to recent flash-points of Sandy Hook and the rapid ‘polar thaw.’ Havird writes with canny aptitude of our shared cultural identities, of her family’s delights and ‘tour[s] of grief,’ and of her own reflective self-portraiture, ‘bingeing on Cheetos; / osteoarthritis in my knees, hips, toes. . . .’ Is she winking a little at Emerson? ‘Language,’ he wrote, ‘is fossil poetry.’”

—David Baker, author of *Swift: New and Selected Poems*

“Clean, clear, and accurate, Ashley Mace Havird’s poems are reportage from the front lines of a life intensely lived. They speak the language of vision—the image, the story, character, a world well and truly seen—and of the visionary: ‘a vision—no—a feeling, / the moment he died, of something blasting apart, / sparks raining down.’ It is obvious that nothing is lost on the sentience of these poems; but to understand how Havird’s mind transforms what otherwise might be ordinary into momentary miracles is to experience, fully, the alchemy of poetry.”

—T. R. Hummer, author of the trilogy, *Ephemeron, Skandalon, and Eon*

“The 49 poems in Ashley Mace Havird’s *Wild Juice* are written in a somber measure and penetrating voice that seem perfectly tuned to the current moment of pandemic-induced isolation and existential crisis. Together, they conjure an amazing portrait of one woman’s exploration of deep internal solitude. While readers of a certain age will easily identify with the many poems which unflinchingly examine the pathos of aging and the role of time, memory, and narrative in fostering acceptance of our fate and that of our loved ones, younger readers will connect with Havird’s harrowing take on contemporary real world crises—gun violence, climate change, anti-immigration. *Wild Juice* is a brave and beautiful book.”

—Kate Daniels, author of *In the Months of My Son’s Recovery*

“Cross Elizabeth Bishop’s eye for observation with Flannery O’Connor’s ear for storytelling and you might get Ashley Mace Havird, a poet who grew up on a Southern tobacco farm with a restless intelligence and a steely wit. Look for her star to rise as steadily as Bishop’s in the years to come: she is that quietly, astonishingly, enduringly good.”

—Julie Kane, author of *Mothers of Ireland*