

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Elizabeth Coatsworth's literary family includes her daughter, former state poet laureate Kate Barnes, and her husband, the nature writer Henry Beston. A noted author of children's books during her life, she also wrote remarkable poems like this one about the territory around her homeplace of Nobleboro.

Lost Graveyards

by Elizabeth Coatsworth

In Maine the dead
melt into the forest
like Indians, or, rather,
in Maine the forests shadow round the dead
until the dead are indistinguishably mingled
with trees; while underground,
roots and bones intertwine,
and above earth
the tilted gravestones, lichen-covered, too,
shine faintly out from among pines and birches,
burial stones and trunks
growing together
above the lattices of roots and bones.
Now is the battle over,
the harsh struggle
between man and the forest.
While they lived,
these men and women fought the encroaching trees,
hacked them with axes,
severed them with saws,
burned them in fires,
pushed them back and back
to their last lairs among the shaggy hills,
while the green fields lay tame about the houses.
Living they fought the wild,
but dead, they rested,
and the wild softly, silently, secretly,
returned. In Maine
the dead sooner or later feel the hug of rootlets,
and shadowy branches closing out the sun.

Take Heart: A Conversation in Poetry is produced in collaboration with the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance. Poems copyright © 1968 by Elizabeth Coatsworth. Reprinted from Down Half the World, Macmillan, 1968, by permission of Kate Barnes. Questions about submitting to Take Heart may be directed to David Turner, Special Assistant to the Maine Poet Laureate, at poetlaureate@mainewriters.org or 207-228-8263.