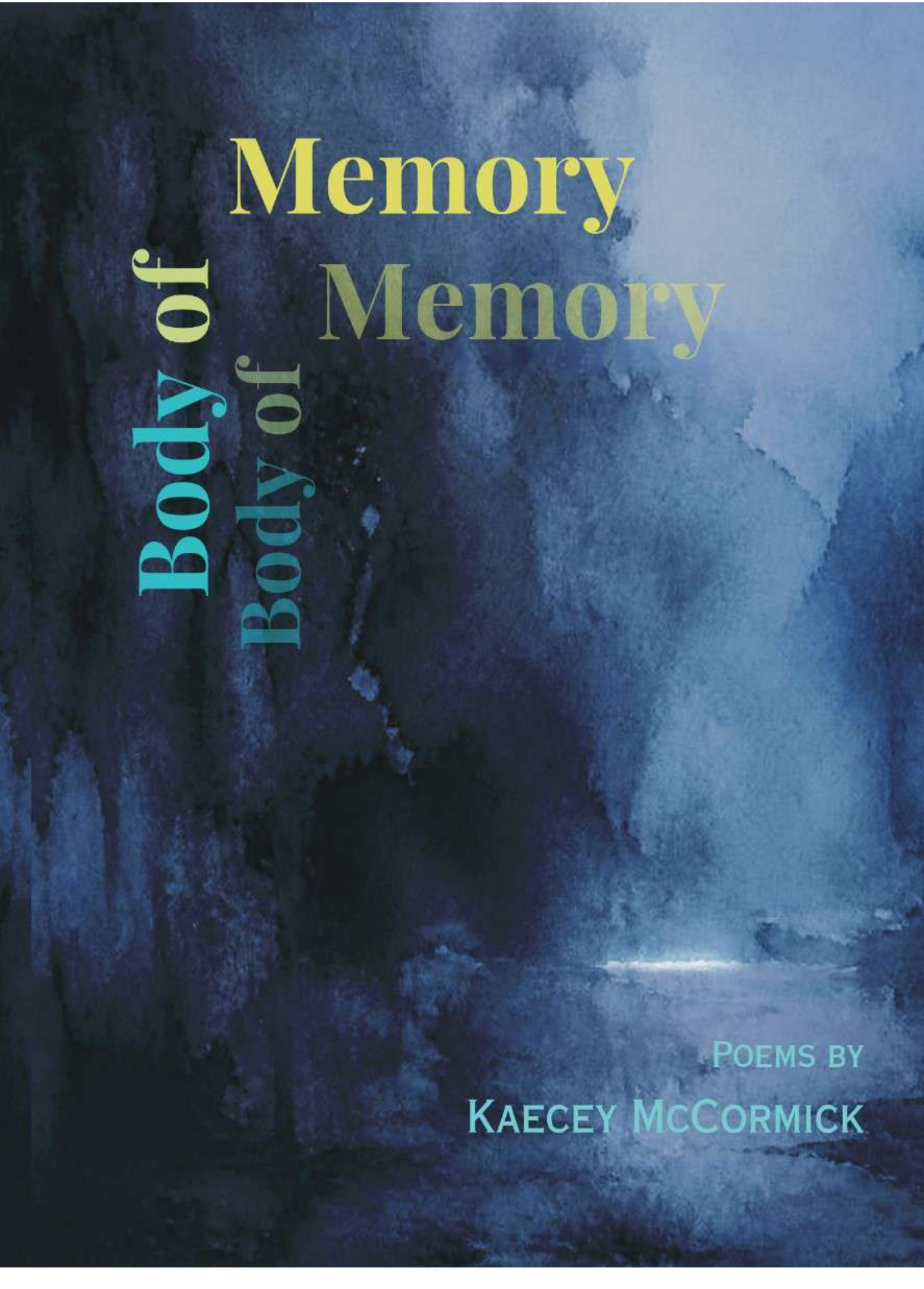

Body of Memory
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Poems by
Kaecey McCormick

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POEMS BY

Kaecey McCormick

Winner of the 2026
Atlanta Review Chapbook Competition
Judged by Joan Kwon Glass

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For Loo

Introduction

I have often been called a "grief writer." I get it, as so many of my poems (and three of my books) have focused on the experience of sudden loss. After some years of being asked about what it means to write on grief, I was asked in an interview whether I was afraid that people regarded me only as a grief writer, and if so, how I would respond to that.

At the time of the interview, I found the question both aggravating and an opportunity to consider what it means to write on "grief." I arrived at the conclusion that in some way, all poets are grief writers–even those of us who write about "joy." Everything is temporary. Everything is temporary.

A poet once asked me whether I thought the world needed more "grief poems." Were there, they asked, any new ways to write about loss, death, absence? I told her that I had no idea, and I meant it. If I ever claim to know what the world needs, please remind me to stop speaking. I barely know what I need most days, let alone the world.

So, when I read *Body of Memory* by Kaecey McCormick, I was utterly stunned. Every word, the arrangement of every word beside another, spoke to grief in a way I had never seen. This is a tremendous, ambitious manuscript—a masterclass on poetic leaps, a magic bag of unexpected images, a curation of silences, spaces between what is known and impossible to know.

Body of Memory is a "miracle…of hollow spaces," to steal McCormick's own words.

Perhaps the world does not need more "grief poems." But a book can still alter, mirror or contest the landscapes of our mourning, can orbit and navigate the remembering of what and whom is no longer here to account for their own lives. From poems about a father's tool bench to a daughter's urn, from funeral flowers to an untethered kite, every poem is astonishing in its restraint, syntax and imagination. I am changed by this book. You will be too.

Joan Kwon Glass
September 2026

Body of Memory

Sing me the lullaby of the restless body. Nights are motion,
shaking as night does through the heavy chambers of my body.

Boats on waves, their wide nets cast—deep livewells holding cells
still dividing. *Raise the anchor,* I cry. *I have a ship that could be*
your body.

I was awake all the bright summer. Sweat and salt
a cool shower between the fiery world and my body.

Breath dissolved into the spaces between my bones,
wind vibrating the broken masts of my body.

When I let her go, when I handed over my baby,
there was a hollow, a vacant lot, a cosmic void, inside my body.

No substance, no mass, no footnotes, no structure—only memory
of movement, fluttering like wings, in the center of my body.

You breathed poems onto paper—images floated free, lifted
onto my tongue and drifted into the quiet space of my body.

From Goat Rock Point

after Wallace Stevens

I found a bottle on Goat Rock
and placed my hand upon the glass.
The hills surrounding it rushed in,
and in it all the world was still.

The snow-capped trees across the gorge
stopped dancing in the snow-filled wind,
and all the birds now held within
stopped sounding out their wintry songs.

It rested on its side as if
abandoned after one last spin—
the way we leave behind our dreams
when dawn's first ghostly light creeps in.

I tipped my gaze up to the sky,
then to the world inside the glass,
and took it with me when I left,
that green and dusty port of air.

Magnetic Resonance

When they found what they were looking for,
her brain and body were speckled with it.

Like mold on bread—
roots anchored in the cells

of each crumb, feeding.
He stayed in the room

with the images, my father said,
long after the doctors left.

Fingers tracing the skin
of those chambers inside himself,

as if feeling the tissue
that would hold her memory.

Nourishment and poison:
one ended where the other began.

If I See You Again

it will be our hallelujah time once more
and we'll sing old hymns from the hilltops
with made-up words we learned from the towhees
when we were small and forever living

I'll whisper the end of the love story I started
in 1993 and you can tell me about heaven
and the comet tails you rode back home
and whether the stars are overstated

you can show me where you hid my coral
lipstick and my baby soft perfume while
I show you my silver stretch marks and the sun—
darkened spots browning the backs of my hands

we'll sneak into the kitchen and cook up
another lie and shout it to the wind which will
carry it with you to the stones on the hill
where the others lie in unpeaceful rest
awaiting your return

Starry Night

"...feel the splendors and terrors of the night!"
—Jean-François Millet

Not the starry night everyone knows—
it is too much to hold: eleven shaking stars,
the wickedly curving moon crouching,
a single stretching tree. The very sky writhes
over the unsuspecting town. I drown
under the weight of that night.

But the starry night most never know—
pinholes spreading cold fire from distant suns,
the mottled sky and barren fields sleeping.
A worn path drifting into light, and everywhere
the muted hush of ending. I revel
in this dark, unfurling, splendor.

Oh starry night! This is how I want
to live: foreground lost to darkness, eyes
lifted to the sky, that trail of stardust streaking.
Beneath me, a path to show the way. Look—
can you see how what might be the end
might also be a beginning?



Kaecey **M**cCormick writes in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she served as Poet Laureate of Cupertino. Her work appears in different literary journals, including *Poet Lore, Baltimore Review*, and *The Pinch*. When she's not writing, Kaecey can be found hiking, reading, or people-watching while drinking coffee. She shares her home with her long-suffering partner, two cats, and a growing collection of rocks.