*Good Bones*, by Maggie Smith review by Andrea Crook

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In her sixth published work, *Good Bones*, Maggie Smith explores the universe through the lens of motherhood. This collection of poems follows two other poetry collections, *The Well Speaks of Its Own Poison* (Tupelo, 2015) and *Lamp of the Body* (Red Hen, 2005), and three award-winning chapbooks. Her featured poem, “Good Bones,” has been heralded as the “Official Poem of 2016” after going massively viral online, and its poignant lyricism is shared amongst every other poem in the collection.

The recurring narrative of a mother and daughter discovering the meaning of life weaves in and out between poems. Each poem pulls back the curtain a little bit more, revealing miscarriages and past loves that feel like a lifetime ago. In a way, many of the poems look back longingly on life, love, and freedom as they once were in a quiet town or a lonely mountainside. In “This Town” she writes, “Face it, your life/ is not what it was. The boy you loved is a dozen/ years behind you, whatever that translates to in miles.” The flowing rhythm of Smith’s poems reads like a love letter, or almost like a bedtime story a mother would tell her daughter as she tucks her child into bed at night. Although rooted in the everyday trials of motherhood, Smith’s vivid imagery transforms the natural world into dream-like place as she imagines the universe. For example, in her poem titled “Sky,” she writes, “Our house stops/ at the roof, at the glitter-black overlap of shingles/ where the sky presses down, bearing the weight/ of space, dark and sparkling on its back.” If you’ve ever known the frustration of having the perfect word to describe an experience on the tip of your tongue but not quite being able to find it, Smith’s poetry solves that problem. Her perfect word choice envelops the reader with a sense of being understood on an intimate level, like when she shares a common childhood memory by asking, “Do you remember covering your eyes to hide, believing you made yourself invisible?” The work as a whole created that feeling; the honest, loving, longing, and empathetic tone of each poem captures a shared human experience of finding light in the darkness.

The collection focuses on legacy: what can a mother leave behind for her children? Smith answers: Hope. Above all else, each poem radiates hope for the future, for her daughter, for herself, for all of humanity. With its achingly sincere style, *Good Bones* would appeal to any reader searching for the good in humanity and praying for the well-being of future generations. After all, Smith tells us, “This place could be beautiful, right? You could make this place beautiful.”