

MUD WATER WILL RISE

CHELSEA CHATTS



A collection of poetry that explores the beauty and complexities of living in America's Southern states.

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My darling daughter Delaney,

*May you always sing the cicada's sweet Southern hymn
and in the face of adversity —
may you rise like the mud water at high tide.*



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Sweet Cicada Hymns

Sundays —
Sun days are magic.
It's more than hocus pocus.
It's the sweet cicada locust
Singing her morning hymns
To the rhythm of the river's whim.

The river wakes at golden hour,
Shining in all its power.
Mud waters rise at high tide.
Mother Earth,
This is her church.

Magnolias whisper
Sweet purities, nobilities,
Dignity.
The red cardinals join the mockingbird's song,
Singing to the rhythm of the wind
And the sweet cicada's hymn all day long.

In a state of whisky over wine,
She seeks a sign through a stretch of time.
She goes chasing waterfalls,

Dipping her toes before the fall.
She takes the path least traveled,
A promenade of mossy bluegrass,
A pasture free of concrete and gravel.

Sundays —
Sun days are magic.
It's more than voodoo,
Hoodoo hocus pocus.
It's the sweet cicada singing her hymn,
It's the river and wind.

It's mud waters that rise at morning's tide,
Reminding us
We're alive.
Mother Earth,
This is her church
Inviting us to pray on her perch.

Backroad Switchbacks

There's a bend in the road,
So I've been told.
A highway inviting me to stay
With her lulling country sway.

But how could I betray —

The salt air that raised me,
That praised me?
The salt water that healed me,
That revealed me?

But her bluegrass twang,
The way she sang
Called me
To join her country weeds.

There's a bend in the road.
A bode of backroad switchbacks,
A series of decisions,
An option of cultural adoption.

Will I stay
Or will I go?
No one knows.

There's a bend in the road,
So I've been told.
One eighty,
Call me a Southern lady.

Nola Magic

Brass melodies fill the air.
The streets are alive.
An interplay of souls fills the sky;
A southerner's lullaby.

Nola magic —
A place of history,
Terrible tragedy,
A campfire story.

Witchy woo woo,
Hoodoo spells,
Ghostly haunts,
Vampires who hunt.

Nola magic —
It defies logic.
A pull of the river's tide,
One that cannot be denied.

Cajun, Creole,
Louisiana cuisine
Fill our spirits without fail.
Hearts full, we beam.

Nola magic —
It's for you,
For me,
For we.

The streets are alive;
An interplay of souls that cannot be denied.
A southerner's lullaby.
We say goodnight, but never goodbye.

June Bug Blooms

We set down roots
Where the June Bugs swoon
And the rose buds bloom.

Buried beneath the earth,
Soil and dirt,
The June Bug is rebirthed.

We set down roots
Where metamorphosis takes time,
Where life's twists and turns unwind.

The June Bug takes shape
Leading the charge of its fate,
Leaving the rest to faith.

We set down roots
Where dirt drinks life-giving rain,
Where water rises and evaporates.

Shiny and new,
The June Bug's shell is one of few
That defends, protects, and deflects,
Spreading fortune to those most subdued —
Spreading fortune to those in need of anew.

We set down roots
Where bolts of fire strike the ground
And bugs light up the night sky around.

We set down roots
Where dreams take shape,
Where dreams take flight —
Where the June Bugs bloom
As much as the rose buds do.

Biscuits and Gravy

Mama always taught me,
Life is this —
It boils down to the basics
Of biscuits and gravy.

A roux of Southern soul,
A layer of thick skin.
A tough exterior,
Yet soft within.

There's no need to worry baby,
It's all biscuits and gravy.

A sprinkle of hope,
A squeeze of love,
You'll see the dough rise,
Like mud water at high tide.

When the world gives you oven's heat,
Know your soul will not be beat.
Give yourself time to thrive.
Your taste for living will come alive.

Life is this,
There's no need to worry.
Baby —
It's all biscuits and gravy.

Raised on Magnolias

I was raised
Where the wild ones play.
I was raised
Where the rocking chairs sway.

I was raised
Where spring blossoms grow
Like sweet honey;
Nice and slow.

I was raised on magnolias,
Ivory whites, pale yellows, and pinks.
I was raised on front porches
With sweet tea drinks.

I was raised to see beauty
In the old and the new.
A Southern tradition
From a new point of view.

I was raised on magnolias
Where the blossoms grow
Like sweet honey;
Nice and slow.

Love & Lore on the Front Porch

Rubbed and shined new,
An heirloom of you.
A fingerbone bound by metal and stone,
No element left alone.

Timeless.
Classic.
You —

You are the past;
The present and future awaiting anew.
But I'm still here
Wishing for you.

I wait on this front porch
Wishing you'd walk through the door.
The rocking chair swings back and forth.
No body to report.

Generations haunt this porch.
Next in line to carry the torch
Of love & lore for the next generation —
Evermore.

Dear Mama

Dear Mama

Comma —

On a cold night you'd wrap me up
Oh, so tight.
Never knowing you were my light;
My whole life.

With the twist of a key
You lulled me to sleep.
Dreaming of who I'd be
One day.

Dear Mama

Comma —

Laughter filled our home,
In love our roots were sown.
Knowing that wherever life goes,
I'm not alone.

Dear Mama

Comma —

Years twist and turn
With some bumps,
Bruises and burns,
Valuable lessons learned.

Unpredictable,
Cyclical,
Life finds a way
To bring back the sunshine's rays.

Dear Mama
Comma —

I've planted roots of my own.
Just know, wherever I go,
You're never alone
Because our roots are deep and love-sown.

Dear Mama
With Love
Comma —

Gone South

Gone South for the winter —
Splintered,
A Southern soul renter
Seeking magic remedies.

A daily dose of smiles,
A pinch of laughs,
Southern drawls,
Y'all.

Gone South for the winter.
It's more than voodoo,
Hoodoo hocus pocus.

The sweet cicada shares her hymns.
The people, an extension of limbs.
Homemade meals with heart,
I never want to part.

Y'all,
I'm here for the long haul.

Gone South for the winter —
A Southern soul renter
Transformed
House and home hunter.

Steel Magnolias

A beauty in bloom,
A sister from another's womb,
Gone too soon.

Poetic, petite.
Parting with a soul so sweet.
Together, we weep.

From the bonds of birth,
We created something lyrical,
A union considered spiritual.

A friendship singing heaven's sweet song
Could never be torn,
Rejected, or regretted for long.

Years of growing pains,
New perspectives gained,
We've gone our own ways.

But together —

We are forever forged by fire.
Transformed and tired,
The strongest of hearts melt as one.

Steel Magnolias,
That's what they call us.

We'll never be the same.
Maybe that's okay,
We're forever tethered.

And together —

We are forged by fire.
We've taken the heat.
We've bent, but we will never break.

We are forever forged by fire.
Transformed and tired,
Hearts made of steel,
We come together to heal.

Steel Magnolias,
That's what they call us.

Country Twang

Strum up the banjo,
Let's go —

A symphony of strings help the banjo sing.
The fiddle swings,
A guitar echoes through the airwaves.
The bass orchestrates wasted haste.
A beautiful melody paved.

Don't judge my country twang.
It's more than mere pronunciation,
It's the language of a nation.

With every underlying note,
The depth of every instrumental tone,
A Southern drawl unlike any known.
Praise the Sultan of Twang,
The people sang.

Don't judge my country twang.
We're more than old trucks, fried chicken, beer,
A campaign conducted of smear.

We are a voice of complex notes,
Working bone to string
To give our country wings.
Our heart and soul,
Lull the ears of the dull.

Join my country twang —
An interplay of sweet epiphanies,
A nation's symphony.

Spill the Sweet Tea

Spill the tea,
Burn your tongue.
Speak no more —
Evermore.

A mouth of stinging sensation,
Vile elation,
Makes way for seeds of doubt,
Spreading disease of gout.

Spill the tea,
Burn your tongue.
What's been said
Cannot be undone.

Hearts break,
Minds unwind,
Spreading ripples through space and time.
All waves settle eventually.

But —

If you spill the tea,
You will burn your tongue.

So, speak no more —
Folklore.

Instead,
Refill your soul with sweet tea.
Wash away your sins
Then come talk to me.

Annalisa Haunts

This place,
This dark space.
Room 311
Took me to heaven.

This place,
This dark space.
A haunted joust
Transformed into a judgment house.

Anna Lisa,
Annalisa,
Chalked up to Southern haunts.
Once upon a time I was more than my ending.
I was a woman —
A woman of want;
A woman of flaunt.

Now, I am a mystery;
A spirit that will never leave.
Yet I am all things you and me.
I am forever a piece of history.

Skin to bone,
He took my head then the throne.
But still —
I am all things you and me.
I am a spirit that will never leave.
I am a screaming piece of history.

A Tale as Old as Dust

A tale as old as time,
A tale as old as dust.

With a set of words,
A single ugly phrase;
With the power of a pen,
An entire class is erased.

A tale as old as time,
A tale as old as dust.

With the stroke of a pen
Our identity becomes a crime.
With a single hateful phrase,
Our autonomy unwinds.

Those in power force a nation
To walk on water,
To dump whisky for wine.
To stay complacent,
Tainted and patient.

And yet —

It's a tale as old as time,
It's a tale as old as dust.

Civil wars reap civil rights.
We continue to fight
For our right
To live a free life.

A Silent Southern History

There's a silent history
The South cannot repeat.
They preach
Be kind, be sweet.

Yet the people starve.
Democracy carved.
Tension at its peak,
Dividing powerful from weak.

We weep.

There's a silent Southern history,
But it's no mystery.
Sex, gender, and the color of our skin.
It is not us,
But the powerful who need to shed from within.

Shed away the chauvinism,
Shed away the hate,
It's not too late.

There's a silent history
The South cannot repeat.
As they say, be kind, be sweet,
Do not admit defeat.

Because
This is a history the people refuse to repeat.
We will not go back —
Pleas fall on deaf ears,
Prepare for attack.

One in One Thousand

Baby Girl,
My whole world —
Will you be the one
In one thousand?

More menacing than a murderous motor,
We rank 9 in 50
For most violence,
For most silence,
For most deaths

From steel that bends and breaks.
Metal shards shred skin to bone
Leaving the innocent empty and hollow.

Baby Girl,
My whole world,
I pray that you will not be the one
In one thousand.

All alone,
Hiding in the dark.
Praying away the dooming red mark
That haunts us,
That hunts us.

Democracy is stripped.
Shouts and screams seize the halls.
Consumed by darkness,
The light in their small eyes fall.

All because a stranger in disguise,
A stranger full of lies,
A stranger full of hate,
Took his hand at playing God and fate.
Breaking our faith
In humanity.

When will we unite
Under one nation
To protect the young,
To protect the pure?

When we will choose
To protect the innocent
Over danger,
Over a violent stranger?

When will we choose
To protect the right to live
A childhood?

When will we choose
To protect the right to live
A fearless life?

Baby Girl —
Thoughts and prayers
That one day
We never need to fear
That you will be the one
In one thousand.

Forged by Fire

Can't trust nobody
To protect her body.
Can't trust nobody
Except her body.

Forged by fire —
She is the crack of lighting,
She is the roar of thunder,
That shakes the ground beneath your feet.

How long must she suffer,
How long must she fight,
For her rights?

Can't trust anyone.
Half truths spun into a web of lies,
He declares her a scarlet letter in disguise.
Little does he know,

She is a flame.
She is heat rising from the ashes.
A woman who will not be chained.
A woman who will not be tamed.

She will suffer
For her rights.
She will suffer
For suffrage.

She will suffer
For autonomy.
She will suffer
For you and me
To be free.

Always remember —
Change is forged by fire.

We are the thunder.
We are the lighting.
We are the roar of the freight train;
The underground railway

That shakes your voice,
That shakes your mind,
Awakening the deaf and blind.

Forged by fire,
We continue to fight
To revive our rights —

For her,
For you,
For me,
For we,
To be free.

Mud Water Will Rise

Mud water will rise,
The people will fall.
Politicians in power lie,
Freedom will stall.

The river will run
Like the mothers of our sons,
Like the daughters of our fathers.
The river will run.

A country's broken foundation,
Stifled elation.
Be strong,
Be patient.

Yet threats and coercion make way for erosion
Of what is right,
And what is just.

A deposition we must.
For freedom we fight,
For freedom we fall.

Appalachia,
It's home.
From the Blue Ridge Mountains
To the Great Smokies.

It's home
For you, for me,
For we —
We must become the channel of change we long to see.

We seek what is right
And what is fair.
Ignore the stares;
The insults.
Ignore the ignorance that blares.

Because mud water will rise.
Headwaters will flow.
The people will rise —
Against our corrupt politicians
And all their lies.

Purple Hearts

A melding of minds,
A melting of hearts,
Bleeding red and blue
For me and you.

God, family, country,
Freedom of religion,
Freedom of expression,
Walk a tightrope of tension.

Dialogue lost in the fog,
Bombs drop, the people sob.
Here we go —
All sense out the window.

A noise of nonsense marches through the airwaves;
A Civil War to be paved.
Blind leading the blind,
Our young yearn for a sign.

If we would stop,
Wait.
If we would push aside the hate,
We'd come to agree that you and me...

We are a melding of minds.
We are a mending of hearts.
We bleed red and blue
For me, for you, for we.

Y'all —
We ain't so different after all.
United with purple hearts,
We stand tall.

Appalachian Trails & Trials

Break away from familiarity,
Alter reality.
The mountains invite me
To walk the fault line;
To dance, laugh, and cry.
A testament of time,
I begin to climb.

More of less,
Less of more.
Meandering the trails, I go.
Walking is a state of mind,
A bend in space and time.

I come to a crossroad
Of the past,
Of what is to pass.
An emotional glacier to conquer,
So, I wander.

Sweat, blood, tears,
The chaos of my mind disappears.
Free from the chains of a cluttered mind,
My soul unwinds.

In the fresh air
Mindlessness,
Mindfulness,
Become one.
Embrace the enlightenment of the sun.

Unstuck,
In motion.
Freedom of devotion,
I continue to walk the line.
Up the hill,
I climb.

Shredding skin to become new again,
I cave to the peaceful power of the mountain.
I walk the line,
Up the hill
I continue to climb.

Foot to dirt,
Summit the earth
Just to be rebirthed.
No matter the chaos that plagues my mind,
I walk the line.
Up the hill —
I will always climb.

The Blue Hole

Submerged —
Beneath the surface
Lies a mystery of you,
Deep and blue.

A natural wonder.
A force greater than lightning's thunder
Sinking under your skin;
A frame of bedrock rims.

Inside —
A waterfall of emotion,
A heart full as the ocean.
A tear of rivers that run,
A force of nature to come.

The journey won't be easy.
It'll take courage.
As the war rages within,
The healing process begins.

Submerged
Beneath the calm turquoise surface
Lies a mystery of you —
A soul that's wild,
Deep and blue.

Autumn's Unwritten Law

Autumn rings —

A summer tease
Replaced by a fall breeze.
Ivory whites and pinks,
Replaced by rusty orange leaves.

Front porch sweet tea
Stirs to cocoa with cream.
Pumpkins and s'mores,
Front porch lore.

Autumn,
She has her own unwritten law;
Sending her orders to ma & pa.

Breathe in the crisp air.
Accept her dare.
Give way to reason,
Find magic in the changing seasons.

Shed the old.
Build a new road.
Pave way for the new,
For a soul of southern roux.

Autumn rings —

Mother nature sings,
Inviting us to embrace our wings.

Holy Smoke

You'll find me at church;
Down the river
At the dirt perch.

You'll find me —
Singing along
To the sweet cicada's song.
Singing along
To the rhythm of the river's whim.

You'll find me —
A trail of tears
Making time to soak,
In you holy smoke.

You'll find me —
Where the wind meets the trees,
Dirt and leaves.

You'll find me —
In a place of peace,
Mother Earth's church.
Confession transformed to lessons.
Blessings.

The mist lifts,
Your clarity,
A gift.

I walk away with holy smoke.
With a piece of the puzzle that is me,
Who I'm meant to be.

I walk away with holy smoke.
A piece that will never leave;
A piece that completes me.

You found me —
I walk with holy smoke.

Elevated Appalachia

There's something about this place
Inviting us to take up space.
There's something about this region,
Its changing seasons.

There's something about the river bend.
Mending time, melting hearts,
We rise like the mud water at high tide.

Purple perfume carried by the wind.
Wild children,
Neighbors close as kin.

Bruised and scuffed,
We lift each other up
High as the Appalachian Mountains.

Skin to skin,
Skin to grass and mud,
Nothing but love.

The Iris blooms spare our souls,
The gravel meets the dirt road,
We return to the mountains we call home.

Elevated without contemplation,
Elevated without complication,
We lift each other up —
High as the Appalachian Mountains.

Salt Air to Mud Water

Born and raised on salt air,
Something in me is shifting,
Lifting, fleeting —
The roots beneath my feet give way.

Salt air
Brushing through my hair, absorbing my skin,
Now sifts through dirt and earth.
My mud water chapter begins.

A baptism by fire,
Bruised and burned.
The mud water swallowed me whole
And the salt air called me home.

Breathe in the present,
Exhale the past —
The tough times,
They won't last.

The mud water swallowed me whole,
A curse of chaos lulled.
Reborn, healed and anew,
I, now, call the mud water home too.

Some days
I flow like a peaceful Tennessee River.
Other days I'm a force of nature,
An ocean wake that will make you quiver.

All I know is this.
Someday —
The waves will settle
Beneath the surface.

Born and raised on the coast,
The salt air still calls me home.
Least I know,
I'm not alone.

Because the mud water,
I am her newfound daughter.
She welcomes me home
Sinking her love beneath skin and bone.

Love Letters

also known as acknowledgements

My darling daughter Delaney —

You are forever my muse, sweet girl. Thank you for inspiring us to take a leap of faith. It is because of you that your father and I chose Chattanooga as our home. Now that we're here, make sure to grow like sweet honey, nice and slow.

My rock, soulmate, and other half, Cameron —

Thank you for your unwavering love. Thank you for embarking on this incredible journey with me and taking the chance to start anew in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

My loving parents, Kim & Tom —

Thank you for cultivating an environment of passion and creativity. Most importantly, thank you for loving me and encouraging me to chase my dreams.

My nugget of a little brother, Connor —

Thank you for being my sounding board in moments of doubt. Thank you for all of your love, encouragement, and for believing in me when I didn't believe in myself.

Love Letters

also known as acknowledgements

My steel magnolias —

Together, we are forged by fire. Thank you for your everlasting bond of sisterhood. Thank you for being there through the good, bad, and the ugly.

My life coach and wellbeing counselor, Kristen —

Thank you for helping me navigate the muddy waters of my deep emotions and this ever-changing constant called life.

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To our Chattanooga community —

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About the Author



Chelsea is the author of the *Mud Water Will Rise* poetry collection and the Content Creator of Chelsea Chatts, an Appalachian lifestyle company. She is a full-time author dedicated to exploring the beauty and complexities of living in America's southern states. Chelsea earned her degree in English Literature from

the University of California, Berkeley and now calls Chattanooga, Tennessee home. In between keyboard strokes, Chelsea lives the elevated Appalachia life with her husband, daughter, and their husky.

Learn more about Chelsea Chatts and what creates the elevated Appalachia lifestyle at www.chelseachatts.com or follow her on social media [@chelseachatts](https://www.instagram.com/chelseachatts).