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Red Hen Press

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# Blue Atlas

POEMS BY

Susan Rich

The raw, often far from idyllic experience of a global love affair that results in an unplanned pregnancy is examined and meditated upon through a surreal prism.

*Blue Atlas* is a lyrical abortion narrative unlike any other. This one-of-a-kind collection follows a Jewish woman and her ghosts as they travel from West Africa to Europe and, finally, to the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. The speaker searches repeatedly for a new outcome, seeking answers in a myriad of mediums such as an online questionnaire, a freshman composition essay, and a curriculum vitae. The raw, often far from idyllic experience of a global love affair that results in an unplanned pregnancy is examined and meditated upon through a surreal prism. The Blue Atlas, a genus of the common cedar tree first found in the High Atlas of Morocco and known for its beauty and resilience, becomes a metaphor for the hardship and power of a fully engaged life.

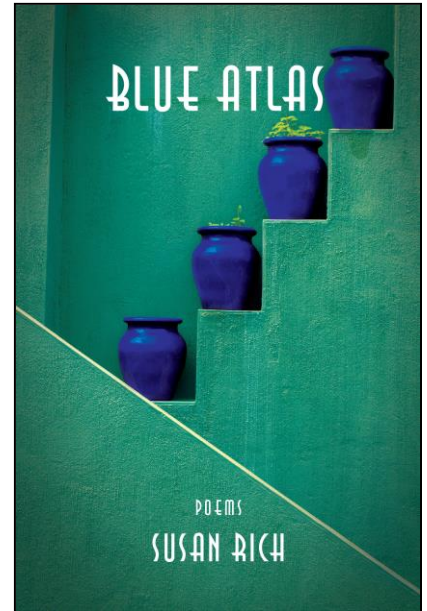
## ADVANCE PRAISE

“Plaintive and ferocious by turns, the voice in Susan Rich’s poems keeps asking the same question: ‘Does anyone escape her own story?’ The answer, of course, is no, especially when the effects of an early loss keep troubling the later decades of a life, exerting measures of devastation, regret, and nostalgia. *Blue Atlas* is Rich’s sixth book of poems, and it marks an apotheosis—an apotheosis that, as the title suggests, is suffused with amplitude and intimacy, woundedness and wonder. Rich has arrived at a place of wisdom in her work, enthralled by still another essential question: ‘what is this heaviness // embedded in our good luck— / this sharp, bronzed hinge?’”

—**Rick Barot**, author of *Moving the Bones*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Rich is the author of eight books, including *Gallery of Postcards and Maps: New and Selected Poems*, as well as *Cloud Pharmacy*, *The Alchemist’s Kitchen*, *Cures Include Travel*, and *The Cartographer’s Tongue: Poems of the World*. Her poetry has earned her awards from Fulbright Foundation, PEN USA, and the Times Literary Supplement (London). Individual poems appear in the *Harvard Review*, *New England Review*, *O Magazine*, and *Poetry Ireland*, among other places. Susan is coeditor with Kelli Russell Agodon of *Demystifying the Manuscript: Creating a Book of Poems*. She teaches at Highline College and directs Poets on the Coast: A Writing Retreat for Women from Seattle, Washington.



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**MORE PRAISE FOR *BLUE ATLAS***

“The remarkable poems of *Blue Atlas* chart an expansive life which spins around an epicenter of loss, but loss is too tame a word, really, for what this speaker bears. ‘I am a woman swollen with the history of my dead,’ Rich writes, ‘a body awash in stories.’ She describes an imperiled childhood and a young adulthood that culminates in a coerced midterm abortion, which ‘stays suspended in resin / like a tiny scorpion, / transforming anger into amber.’ *Blue Atlas* exquisitely performs the way trauma—the utter loss of self-determination, of choice—can turn a life to seawater, to drift, to ‘somehow, the might still be—’ mapping ‘constellations of in-between,’ suspended between deciding and undecided, from a space outside of the circumference of longing, where poetry lives.”

—Diane Seuss, author of *frank: sonnets*

**FROM *BLUE ATLAS***

**Arborist / Abortionist**

Procured by anxious relatives  
who demanded

a disappearing trick—

prepaid like a surcharge  
for yard work done in the off-season:

his steel tool severing

a quirk of a tree limb,  
attached to the nub of a stubborn bud;

he didn’t question  
how I appeared,

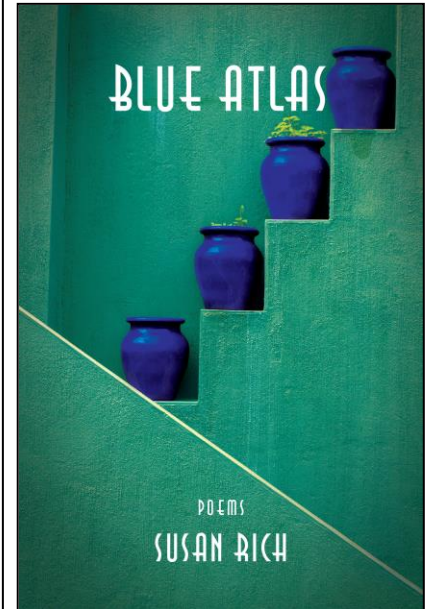
transplanted into his waiting room—

never inquired as to the coauthor  
of my infinitesimal text—

although he’d memorized its map,

extracted the troublesome little branch  
that obscured the golden overlook,

and restored the river view.



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