

***If a Poem Could Live and Breathe* by Mary Calvi**

One review I read called this book a “fact-filled romance”, the story of Alice and Theodore Roosevelt. I think that is actually more fitting than historical fiction, although the conversations and some of the story is simply the author’s creation.

Calvi uses the letters written between Theodore Roosevelt and Alice Hathaway during the years of their courtship and brief marriage to generate this love story. Their time together began in 1878, when 19-year-old Teddy Roosevelt meets the young Alice Hathaway while visiting with a college friend. Alice and Teddy both loved literature, and writing to each other while apart was the natural answer for their growing relationship. Both felt out of place in the sociality roles they had been born into, but each admired the other for the strength of character and their desire to improve themselves. Alice felt strongly that women should have a larger role in society than supporting their husband’s interests, and Teddy was determined that he could provide better governmental leadership, and strengthen the role of the USA in international politics. They were married when Alice was 19.

Alice’s health was always poor, and the brief time in which they were married was no exception. She passed away two days after the birth of their daughter Alice, from kidney failure, thought to be in part caused by Bright’s disease, undiagnosed and exacerbated by the pregnancy. Ironically, in the same house, Alice’s mother-in-law passed away on the same day from typhoid.

The book is divided into four parts. Each part contains a chapter entitled “Here Roams Theodore”. These chapters are written in first person (Roosevelt) format, as Calvi creates a grief journal of the two years he spent in North Dakota following Alice’s death.