

## CHAPTER 2 INTERTIDE



### 1. Dowsing

These two bare twigs, formerly bayberry, too scant to be driftwood but nicely branched and silvered, they fit the hand so well I carry them full circuit around the island with no vain intention of taking either home with me, but I like the feeling of winnowing the sea breeze, of holding hands with the sky, of sensing how a lobster feels waving its claws in communication with Neptune and the sea.

### 2. Dawn Eagle

glides dark above the spruce  
at just enough daybreak  
to throw cloud shapes  
across the bay,  
edged at island tide lines  
with a trace of snow.

North wind ruffles the bay,  
but here's this year's eagle,  
last summer's chick?  
I see the bird not quite crow-black,  
with that shadow pattern  
of the distant hills,  
and I suppose cold rocks, bare trees  
it reads as future,  
subtle sign of spring.

### 3. December, Northwest Harbor

Snow buntings  
come rippling overhead  
barely overheard in private conversations  
On the frozen beach  
the wave-wet pebbles glow  
Keen wind brings tears  
as if conferring special beauty to the brave  
Sharp against cold blue the flock  
bright and quick as sun  
idea, memory, life, or love  
in a mirror flash and gone.

### 4. Eider Envy

Inland I'm told  
the maples are wearing garlands  
of plastic jugs and pails.  
The sap is rising.

Here on the Island  
spruce shadows hold the cold  
and we make do  
with bare bushes  
decorating dooryards with the neon  
splash of plastic Easter eggs  
and the lobsterman  
sweatshirted in the sunshine  
patting the elegant flare of his boat  
by the ladder -  
he's testing the hull.

Was it yesterday the frozen cove  
was locked-down desert? Today  
the shore is ringed with rotting blocky slabs.  
In a languid band of Prussian blue the rockweeds wave  
and the silver sheen is alive  
with thousands of eiders.  
It's galactic, this salt-and-pepper sprinkle,  
about equal parts of male and females.

The sound of this eider Eden  
with the snoozers dozing in the middle  
and the action out at the edges,  
this megaflock - their splashing and bobbings  
make wavelets' rippling sound.  
Their murmuring conversations  
may be private, for initiates only,  
those who cannot imagine  
wishing to be anywhere else today  
when the sap is rising.

## 5. March Tracks

Last of snows, recycled  
layering daily tracks on mine  
at the shore between the tides  
Fox prints grow ego-big as Brother Coyote.  
The X mark of the Crow

has written that cuneiform  
message tally not for me.

Where winter storms have clawed  
a clam shell scatter from the bank  
lie bits of pottery on which  
I fancy I can read the maker's mark  
cord print on clay  
the touch of Dawn People.

Beside the waves  
in company and comfort  
of creatures of the near and distant past  
their spirits speak to me  
as we walk together  
on the path.

#### 6. Moving Day

Along the valleys  
of the ocean floor  
improbable as streams of  
bison in the bay  
the lobsters went  
green and clawed  
tiptoeing out to sea  
unobserved as summer went.

#### 7. First Osprey, April 16, *Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*

Osprey, who dares  
plunder the eagle and wins  
we pause every time to watch  
your casual crook-winged beat up the sky  
mackerel gleaming in the talons of  
your nonchalance.  
As my son once explained to me  
you have to be born to be cool.

There was nothing casual about  
the line gale that yesterday screamed through here  
shaking our bridge, plucking it like a lyre  
licking hungry at the causeway  
battering cowering houses with waves of such awe  
that fishing boats stayed on their moorings, every one.  
Not just their women, but sea-crusted men  
spent the hours stealing glances over their shoulder.  
We crept to our beds, shut windows to keep the deluge out  
slept fitfully, wholly unable to block the ocean's roar  
the answering grinding moan of beach rocks in the dark.

Born cloudy, cool of its own sort  
breezy morning finds us, all over the island  
busying ourselves packing lunches  
doing up breakfast dishes, gossiping over power outages  
pausing to survey the gear going with us.  
I imagine I hear ospreys  
calling to each other  
that unmistakable piercing whistle  
I want so fiercely that I step outside  
where they are circling overhead  
calling, soaring  
in signature  
arrival.

## 8. Black Ducks

This morning.  
the narrow tide rush  
though the old millrace  
wears an ice glaze,  
holds three ducks fast.  
On the ice shelf rest two more  
black ducks plump and black and still,  
like hockey pucks.

How must it feel

when bare feet freeze  
like a tongue on steel  
in a night below zero  
as last night was?  
How does the heart beat  
when the lattice ice binds  
in that final instant?

Floating motionless  
under glittering winter stars  
like folks who so hate change  
that they will not look,  
what do they feel when day comes,  
and ice comes,  
and the old life has died?

## 9. Sailing around the Island

the shocking smack of wave on rock,  
    sibilant pour,  
blue retreat, regroup,  
    the surging heart  
comes again to realize  
    the most granite row of senseless rocks  
eventually does yield  
    to the forward press  
of wind and waves.

Knowing that the sun won't always shine  
    and the wind be fair,  
we trust the boat that carries us  
    to the unseen power, the rudder, sail, and chart  
bringing us safe to port just long enough  
    to fit our craft to ride once more  
the ceaseless tides of change.

The good sailor  
trims and tacks  
does not take down the sail  
just because it is in the way of the wind.

10. Light on the Mountain

First hour of day,  
bare dawn  
plays most revealing light  
on Camden's hills.  
We see most clearly then  
- that hour  
waking from our dreaming  
before the ordinary day clouds  
overtake us.

11. Mackerel

Out of mind's vast  
blue deep they come,  
racing into coves  
flashes of silver bearing  
black-barred stanzas,  
writing ripples.

You don't call mackerel.  
You know the tide  
and go out in your boat  
or onto the pier  
and you wait,  
knowing that unless  
a line or net is in the water  
no one ever catches  
the meaning  
or the music.

## 12.       Globs

When I picked one up, pressing ever so gently,  
it squirted in the most graceful way,  
right and left, and out both its spouts.

My classroom teacher self rejoined us in the cove  
as mind and eye took in what we were looking at:  
real tunicates, not text book drawings, but blobs  
of life lined up like baby birds swaying plump  
on eel grass frond just beneath our kayaks.

Tuna cakes? How like the liverworts, or horseshoe crabs,  
the old and simple ones I love, Yes, the very ones  
scientists say began experimenting with nerve cords  
back in primordial soup, give or take a billion years or two.  
No life-listing birder ever felt more triumph than I,  
floating with my friend, drunk on meeting the grapes of the sea,  
sharing the joy of pure intellectual orgasm.

Tonight the paper warns that sea squirts may be coming.  
Monstrous monopoly blotting Georges Bank,  
big bully cousins of the little sweeties we just met.  
The Web warns that the Brits are worried that  
stealth squirt attacks seem to have been going on  
right under our notice, ever since wooden hulls and Revolution.  
Alien invaders, hostile takeovers, newer, faster,  
more the watch words of today, while we're just catching on,  
just catching up.

I plucked a sea grape to see it squirt,  
an animal alive in a most graceful way,  
right and left, out both its spouts.

## 13.       Sea Smoke

At ten below zero we may not see  
the thin line in the thermometer,  
but cold makes clear the north wind,



Alberta Clipper, as gulls beat  
up the brow of Arctic blow,  
slide down the wind's back  
wing tip to wing tip a dozen birds  
wheeling as one across the harbor,  
white shapes dark like the proud-named  
fishing boats at steaming anchor there  
behind the glinting sun.

Dead-men-walking  
we call those ghostly plumes,  
fog super-cooled – and marching,  
ragged rows in wave platoons.  
We believe now that we see it,  
normally invisible stuff  
that we call air.  
Yes, we hear it, feel it, fear it –  
the awe, the beauty, and the chill  
of all we do not care to see.

#### 14. Shore Fog

Out of the mouth  
of the cove comes  
the breath of tide,  
current made visible  
as gulls and rockweed ride  
before the fog  
closes in

not with a swirl or a sweep,  
but with an imperceptible  
increase in density,  
a cultivated inertia  
celebrating indifference  
with the redeeming  
transience of fog.

## 15. Shore Gold

The sinking sun spreads gold  
wide across the waves, the rocks, the bay,  
no gleaming wave predictable more than I,  
crested into oceans both of space and time.

Sun lowers now a narrowing trail of flame  
laid upon the waves to land's edge, altar-flat.  
Waves whisper "Nothing lasts"  
while sun sinks lower yet, now half behind the purple hill.

Gold glints are few and only by the shore,  
last gleam heart-straight to my reluctant eyes.  
No, the narrowing beam aims higher, truer,  
to that unblinking eye of inner wisdom.

Radiant sunset sky above  
- diffuse, disarming,  
and nothing lasts -  
glowing fragments burnish shore  
and fade.

Like alchemists turning dross to gold we aim  
beyond the evanescent in compassionate engagement -  
change in spite of gathering dark.

## 16. Windchill Warning

Below zero, sundown  
earnest footprints squeak  
bright lashes zipper up  
and nose hairs knit,  
first curious then with menace.  
A line of brow exposed  
does shocking ache,

skull's bare teeth grinning  
the least beyond demure.  
We're all reluctant dames at tea  
our lungs a nervous twitter  
behind the scarf,  
"Oh, just a wee bit, thank you"  
to the evil air on offer.  
Just out beyond the door  
the weight of cold  
cleaves through the dark  
each breath a saber slice,  
the waiting wolf of death  
much nearer than before.

17. Black and Blue

First spring heat:  
night-blue mountains  
soot-black clouds  
flat black sea with a silver stain -  
and the wild pear blooms.

Along toward dawn of an uneasy night  
the sky above the breathless cove  
cracks  
with a flash and rumbling summons  
due our past indulgences.

The purging rain comes with no intention,  
does not rinse clean our winter weariness.  
We now must close the clam flats  
against the toxic runoff of our own untidiness.

First spring heat:  
night-blue mountains  
soot-black clouds  
flat black sea with a silver stain -  
and yet the wild pear blooms.

18. Dawn Frieze

On black spruce boughs huddle  
oddly glowing remnants of last snow,  
still night enough that Eagle Island Light  
flashes, fixed star to far planet of first fishing boat.

Briefly offered brush of light  
frescoes Camden Hills,  
band pressed narrow by the lowering sky.  
Masquerading as Mount Etna,  
clouds lie upon on their northern flank.

The crows cry  
“Pay attention, now!”  
and I do,  
not just because  
I’ve seen Pompeii.

19. January Thaw, Sun Coming Up.

Ice arena spotlight  
sweeps the flat grey bay  
glinting on the rippling  
wake that marks  
the flock of sea ducks  
down from the north  
among our ice cakes.

This arctic archipelago,  
its gyre’s a miniature  
of Gulf of Maine,  
its slow parade  
of equidistant floes  
stately goes  
in spite of pot-lid,

bath tub, spare-tire scale.

My culture has no word  
for hot glow of white,  
the cool of clear,  
these melting islands,  
snow on ice  
silent with menace,  
their own doom doubled,  
reflected image.

Across the hush of ebbing tide  
that wake of ducks:  
Oldsquaw/Longtail  
Tan/black/white, field guide-plaid -  
these dapper darlings row,  
tracing lifelines  
on the dark and liquid cold,  
trumpeting their yodeled call.

Synchronous tip-up,  
the flock dives, one splash,  
to reappear  
as popping corks  
in tandem of attraction  
- or aggression -  
spike of tail erect,  
so male the drakes,  
until some unseen signal  
sends the group aloft  
in careful choreography.  
Between pairs, the force is love;  
between nations, peace.