

## Chapter 3 ISLAND TIME



### 1. Advent Outing

Garden harvest barely gathered in  
first snowfall on the layer of fallen leaves  
darkness blotting out the end of afternoon  
with too much night when we go to the woods  
to gather awkward armfuls of fragrant fir  
to green our church and hearth.

Tipping we call it  
you might think just for branches' ends  
but in deeper truth we sense  
a coming balance shift.

We will go forth illuminating  
frigid lanes, dark houses, bunkered world  
merely human wicks not consumed  
by the radiant energy of hope but  
aglow with trust in season's turning.

### 2. Christmas Light Contest

It's layers of time pressing deep

that make midwinter nights so dark,  
the press of past, like annual rings in wind-snapped spruce,  
    succession of a century  
    years of high school proms,  
    some good, some not,  
    the year that Grandma died,  
    when Dad was born,  
    the year the Russian trawlers anchored just off shore,  
    when the bridge was built,  
    when the grocery burned,  
    the sardine factory closed,  
    when Lisa had twins  
    and the neighbor's boy was killed in 'Nam,  
    when Dad's sternman drowned....

Sometimes we just go driving round the Island  
to see the colored lights - red and green, all blue,  
or clear and twinkling - that folks keep lit  
on roofs and trees and backyard boats till spring,  
cheering comfort, small acts of civic generosity.

### 3. High Season

This morning we delivered the garlic bread  
for the benefit supper tonight to pay for  
Al's heart by-pass surgery and then  
we dropped off the blueberries for  
the Farmer's Market on the way to pick up  
the mail and get the paper for Annie who  
is not driving and take the painting to  
the craft show to benefit the school art program.  
I saw the minister on the way between  
the funeral and the wedding and I know  
her family is due to arrive this afternoon.

It's a clear-air beautiful day  
with just enough wind for  
an armada of sail boats out already  
and the eaglets just fledged on Second Island.

The Billings have picked more raspberries and  
down in town, on my way home to grab lunch  
I saw some tourists in their fancy clothes  
heading out leisurely to do the galleries.  
I hope they are enjoying vacation but I  
would not trade places with them even though  
for us who live here this is highly crazy season.

#### 4. Garden Gamelan

Bamboo wind chimes  
hanging in the spruce  
slowly begin  
to sound  
as the onshore breezes  
rise

carrying the sparking  
clatter beat of the big thumb  
of that black-banded brown grasshopper  
which time and again jumps away  
and turns to face me.

Crickets, quick and silent, scurry  
through the grass, dark ones  
knobby-kneed and crawling,  
with a lacquered look.  
Invisible synchronicities pulse through us  
when they find their right spots.

Standing birch trees rustle  
like a concert cough.

Electric, those grasshoppers circle me.  
Full-frequency clicks fan  
so much quicker  
than the brain can grab,  
round hot sound,  
a splendor of sonorities

over the brief riff  
of a lone cicada.

## 5. Spring Color

All the past weeks  
the hills have glowed  
with clear yellow greens,  
new buds and new leaves,  
and rosy breath of inexperience  
blushing a spring world.

Unable to cope with all that  
particular shade of blood red  
alongside this hope green,  
our human eye or brain  
perceives these frequencies  
vibrating in cosmic contest  
one against the other.

From our small perspective  
we humans have difficulty  
distinguishing beginnings from ends,  
so the trees in their quiet wisdom  
show us how the world buds  
and grows and crisps and flutters on  
again and time again.

## 6. Lengthening Out

They speak of lengthening out, the fishermen do  
as they move their traps yet deeper  
following lobster to where they winter.  
As the days grow shorter, no, it's darkness lengthening  
that calls for ever longer lines, going deeper down,  
deeper draught of danger, profit, freedom, wet and cold.

Here on the highway I see another who had the one good day  
he needed to haul not battered by the north winds

bringing winter to the bay.

One last haul, and then his traps are stacked  
and trailered home to winter back behind the barn.

As I follow behind his pickup easing down the highway,  
in raking light it feels like late but it's just past noonday sun.  
The stacked wire traps sketch cage cartoons,  
Common Ground Fair just two short months ago:  
the show chickens in all their tweeds and fluff.

I see them perched, that one last haul,  
ballast bricks barnacled and brittle-starred,  
lines coiled like rooster tails, each cage aswirl  
with phantom fowl, the bottom bantams of the bay.

Next week when we dry-landers see turkey  
on the platter, these men still rolling just a tad,  
they'll see a different bird there on the table  
as they fill their plates and pause in thanks.

## 7. Fish Creek, Early April

We were standing on a matted  
salt hay carpet pressed by the spring sun  
- velvet black spiders and I -

drinking in the golden topaz beauty  
of winter's brew of tannin tea  
melting down from inland woods

when a cold breeze made the tree tops sway.  
Gaunt they were, those tall spruce,  
and worn-looking against the young spring sky.

It was a hard winter. You wouldn't want  
to say that they were dancing, those dark trees  
with grey snow forgotten in their shade.

A sudden race of sun-sparks

rides the wind up the dimpling stream  
like a school of spirit fish.

To my eye the concrete culvert here  
looks placed too high for swarms  
of smelt or alewife to hurl themselves

come the moonlight, back to the pools  
where they first saw spruce tops dance.  
Do any fish still come here from the sea,

drawn by the sweet taste of home stream  
as my dog and I first smelled the bay,  
returning each summer to heart's home?

## 8. Chokecherry Harvest

Tired, sticky, stained, I count  
the pleasures of our annual Labor Day observance  
autumn alchemy of gathering in the hedgerow harvest.

We sang the harvest with wooden spoon.  
Quart jars ladled full and skimmed,  
roily foam's full rolling boil  
set aside for breakfast toast, and tea.  
The equal measure of sugar was not too dear a trade.

We sang the harvest with red hands.  
Squeeze and twist, the plump pillow case  
bag dripping on the porch  
invites raccoons from the night

We sang the harvest with the spangled spider.  
Under all those eyes we misers roll the cherry gems  
to banish the withered among them.  
Away, crawly come-along caterpillars,  
writhing zoo of wonder bugs.

We sang the harvest with plastic pail.

Grab the ragged limb and milk the motley fruit  
Mother of Cherry, ruby rain.

We sang the harvest from town hall.  
Giggling from the leafy shadows  
of the parking lot where this year's  
prime cherries hung, we spied on our selectman  
as he goes inside to laugh at us with the clerk  
from whom we asked permission. Well,  
no Islander admits they ate mussels either  
before they were trendy with garlic and wine.

If road crews spare  
the vernal lace of frothy blooms  
before they brush and pave,  
we will have a sweet harvest  
Not hard-times food, but

The Confident Gourmet's  
New Native Natural Organic  
Old Fashioned  
Essence in a jar  
Chokecherry Wealth.

9. Blackberry Pie, for Community of Christ Dedication, September  
25, 2004

See it, say it;  
Feel it, pray it.

There's a road I know where blackberry bushes tower  
and you're welcome to pick into pail or cup,  
according to your style.  
Send the dark sweetness to stain your hungry mouth -  
and the hiding mouse gives thanks for each berry that you drop.

It's that special roll of thumb  
across the full ripe fruit which sends the berry  
to your cupping palm,

a gesture so subtle you have to live it to know it,  
like a Christian life.

See it, say it;  
Feel it, pray it.

To sip the orange jewelweed a hummingbird roars by,  
a tiny Elijah on his chariot flight;  
and a warbler peeks through the canes,  
new testament text for this briary world with its crowns of thorns.

On white wings the butterfly ascends the sunny heavens  
where just last night the Milky Way smiled across the starry dome  
in a sky-wide grin, teasing us with the possibility of frost,  
reminding that we're blessed both day and night.

See it, say it;  
Feel it, pray it.

It's when you're alone and quietly busy you can attend  
that private conversation inside your head and heart.  
The busy world hides how the soul builds  
a church, a spiritual life, by the humble act of baking berry pies.

Come with me on that lonely road  
where the brambly bushes tower,  
where the blue bay sparkles round an Island day  
and all God's world will keep us company.

See it, say it;  
Feel it, pray it.

## 10. Talisman, February Nor'easter

After night's ferocious force  
the spruce cower  
white-lined on the sea side.



Out from a final snowflake flurry  
appears  
white-on-white

an eagle  
haloed like a magnet  
with half a dozen heckling crows.

Of all the human words  
that could be pinned  
on the eagle disappearing north

*disdain*  
*hauteur*  
*aplomb*

only *aplomb* has the weight  
to stay with *eagle*, enduring  
like a pocket-riding stone.

## 11. Recipe

A particular salt and sweet,  
- steamed clams and blueberry pie -  
comes with the unmuffled four-stroke  
whine of lobster boat engines  
overlaid with a delicate counterpoint,  
thrush song piping in the spruces.

The loud-talking men there on the bay  
think I'm not working - and they are -  
just because I'm sitting out in the morning sun.  
This shore house and I  
have been here longer than most of them,  
and by now it's my second coffee break.

In the early years  
this sensory mix wrapped  
sweet hopes, parade-ready

for Fourth of July,  
bedding aired, cupboards  
cleaned and filled,  
summer prospect full ahead.

But so many years of waiting  
for men to come ashore,  
the empty rattle of clam shells  
and cold pie crusts.  
The thrush doesn't sing much anymore.

## 12. Swashbuckling

Like a handsome man with a dainty woman at his side  
the spruce trees black on the wooded hills  
promenade the gentle birches  
demure in new spring greenery  
with billows of shadblow's lacey blooms,  
the annual mid-May gala  
to welcome back the warblers  
just before the blackflies crash the party.  
The leaves of the bush that blooms when  
the shad run up the spring-full rivers to spawn  
- those leaves glow pink  
before green pigment takes them ripely over.  
Old spruces, do they think back to their youth,  
and like the crone with the silver hair  
still feel their inner self in youth?

## 13. Off Season

Although the dripping  
driveway chains  
across November rains  
are still intrusive figure,  
not yet our ground reclaimed,  
we die and laugh

regardless of surveillance cameras,  
the timer-lights  
of empty mansions glimpsed  
through cold wet trees  
down private lanes  
of near inconsequence.

#### 14. Seeing Clearly

New to this community, my first wintering,  
resident now as you can read from my muddy license plate,  
sweeping storm debris from my front walk  
in the newness of April  
I assess the list of things I had not known.

Through red haze of maple flowers and plump tree buds  
on our island of an evening now  
the view is longer than in summer.  
No longer do I still see the ski slope lights across the bay  
nor rue the house lights on North Haven's shore  
and now we do have t-bone steak  
and The New York Times in the grocery.

I am too polite to tell you  
that we got along with the Bangor Daily  
and Island AdVantage for our news  
back when we didn't see yogurt till Fifth of July.

Summer folk wintering over,  
person from away, PFA's whose huge houses  
invade our zip codes,  
your money votes in school and town meetings.

You ask when we will treat you like you live here:  
When you act like it.

Please look at me. I smile back as an equal.  
Listen closely: sometimes what we islanders do not say  
is also very loud.

## Trophy View

As the rawness of pain  
draws mind to an ache,

hand straying absently  
back to the seeping wound,

so my eye relentlessly  
seeks that new lesion,

arrogant wart on the blue ridge line,  
raw timbers' ochre blot unblending

with gaunt remnants of trees  
whose neighbors lie felled

burnt, blasted, scraped,  
so someone with money

can drop in occasionally to  
admire the view

from a cauterized distance  
safe from being touched by

the dirt-humble community  
with its own quiet rhythms.

## 15. Picking Crabmeat

I cannot quite shrug off the troubles of the world –  
nobody asks me how to run it -  
but bare feet cool against the kitchen floor boards,  
I am picking summer crabmeat,  
Italian opera on the radio as I work,  
crab rolls for grandchildren.

No Roman emperor ever  
had such pleasure,  
earned by age.

Wiping my hands on the bibbed apron  
like hers, I recall Vida  
who taught me how to do this  
with a small hammer and a slab of granite.  
She wore stout laced black shoes  
on her scoured clean wood floor.  
I was young and far away  
when she might have liked  
help with storm windows  
to keep out the loneliness and cold.  
If only she'd known about Verdi.

#### 16. View from Settlement Quarry

After the puzzling drama of five eagles  
screaming like gulls at one another,  
the details of our walk seem small:

nestled deep in moss the mussel shell  
blue as distant Isle au Haut,  
pearly as the bay that shimmers  
out there in the distant view

dwarf cinquefoil  
no taller than the lichens  
lining out the granite cracks  
with clear sharp red leaves  
like flaming magic sparrow tracks.

Surprised fall color comes  
in such tiny packets at our feet  
we ask why maples must have all the fun  
then realize that nature needs no fancy  
no similes, no metaphor, no measure

for all  
just  
is.

17.      Curse

I cursed the birch  
by the boulder there  
grown up to block  
the favorite view.

Birch beetles heard  
and did it in.  
It's dying now  
so best take care,

you big house builders  
who'd hide our bay,  
I hear echoing hammers  
of your crews

and my friends  
the carpenter ants,  
they are listening too.

18.      Huckleberry Hats Off

Trimming the path by the shore  
admittedly bonsai, ikebana style,  
I come upon a grove of shrubby greenery.  
Shall I be ruthless,  
cut the innocent huckleberry  
thicket off the path?  
For years they have reliably marked  
the way to the shore  
with flaming foliage in the fall.  
Is that enough to buy them time and space,  
a pardon for being in the way?

Just as I reach out with clippers  
black globes catch my eye,  
a handful of berries on a bush at last.  
Bland but sweet and precious for their rarity  
I tip my hat and fill it with a few.

19. North Wind, November

Green waves headed toward the ocean  
curl high, flow great trailing lines back-river  
wave tops dashing ahead of themselves  
to fill the air beyond the flaming huckleberries  
with a Niagara of spume.  
The last sweet peas lash ineffectually  
before tomorrow finds them dangling black.  
House lights flicker down the road,  
spruce roots rocking off their granite bases  
and the first mouse is heard scrabbling  
inside the walls joining the refugees  
finding our way to new quarters.  
For a day or so of mad and unhinged time  
the wind may threaten to carry on this siege,  
the price we pay for daring to admire the bay head-on.