

Chapter 5  
Farther Afield



## 1. Ice Out

From the corners of my mind comes a question:  
where, where? Haven't I seen something like this before?  
Some intimation of this modest miracle,  
every spring clear, enduring only in recurrence, lovely.

I was in high school, Spring Break  
when we went to New York City  
awed by the clarity of Stuben glass  
in well-lit cases in the hush next door to Tiffanys.

Or just married when we stood  
in tourist lines in early summer London  
to glimpse the sceptered sparkle, crowns and orbs,  
England's treasure, famed crown jewels.

Today in spruce shadow at the ice bridge  
spanning the melt-out from the bog,  
tiny tessellations, frozen shapes  
glistening on lush tapestry of verdant moss,  
while a first white-throated sparrow sings  
that we have seen the last snow and promises  
tomorrow that this ice too will be only a memory.

## 2. State of Matter

Through the window glass  
I watch the sea smoke swirl  
In columns riverdancing  
above the January bay.

Bright vapor schools foreboding glide  
with frozen fog-wraith choreography  
so like the quick and shimmering  
shower of fish above me diving in the Caribbean  
when reefs and I were young and healthy,

neither knowing we were rich.

Green water, grey sheen, viewed  
on the other side of glass—  
fluid, breath or frozen, incarnations  
of the tears we weep to make a life

### 3. Labor Day Eve

Though blackberries are not yet nearly ripe  
summer and swimming are about to end.  
Water shock stays just as I remember it  
from my childhood at The Lake  
(we never said the word *Ontario*)  
- the nip of breezes' cool caress,  
kiss of the warm dock  
the yin and yang of bare skin  
and hot hearts.

Tonight I will wrap myself  
once again in a warm quilt  
though not the old ivory one with roses.  
I will dream of tomorrow's grand picnic  
white hots, German beer  
crisp fried endless yellow perch fillets  
and over the twilight twitter of purple martins  
I will hear again my grandmother's  
gentle laughter from the porch below.

### 4. North Country Spring

I was still a girl  
when I lived there  
in that different time,  
another place  
with its dairy meadow grandeur,  
bare open skies.

I fell in love  
with that lad-like land,  
windswept hair disheveled,  
brawny arms widespread,  
tossing me nosegays with a jaunty laugh,  
holding me to him,  
my cheek against the loose-fitting shirt  
of alluring space and almost daunting possibility.

## 5. Rhodora

Driving west on Route 2  
a New Hampshire bog in spring -  
she barely resisted the impulse to shout "Holy Shit!"  
contenting herself instead with "Wow! Rhodora."  
Poem words usually roll off her  
but that word *rhodora* has clung all these years  
during which she never saw one.  
'Beauty is its own excuse for being'.  
Magenta is not a color she ordinarily likes  
yet there it was, wildest azalea  
flashing by, improbable  
genius of juxtaposition,  
sizzling starred cotton grass carpet  
unconditionally pole-axing blue Hampshire hills

He drove steadily on.  
"Do you want to turn back?" she asked knowing  
he had not seen what she saw.  
He drove silently on.

It was not until somewhere north  
of Tamworth that she had sorted out  
just what that said to her.

## 6. Flatlander's Post Script to Kinsman

You protested when you heard me  
call a nice New Hampshire mountain

“green obstruction”.  
Yet raised in South Jersey  
at the Quaker edge of pine barren flats  
I never met a mountain  
till I married and moved away  
unless you count those Pocono rides  
each summer on our way to Grandpa’s,  
which always made me car sick.

Now from the other side of Aetna and the Alps,  
Kilimanjaro and the Himalaya,  
I’ve learned to ski,  
lived by the snowy Adirondacks,  
walked in the butterfly sunshine  
of Rocky Mountain meadows  
so beguiling I would consider leaving  
the ashes of me there to grow high wild.

Perspective looks different  
from where I am now,  
but still I am committed  
both now and when the time comes  
to Penobscot’s level Bay  
as surely as each drop of mountain mist  
knows it seeks the sea.

## 7. Capillary Reaction Against Modern Art

In the mid-Atlantic town where I grew up  
no building stood taller than the sycamores  
beneath which Washington and Jefferson  
had strolled thinking grand thoughts about a new country  
where the King’s troops had marched in vain.

Winters we went to visit Grampa in Florida  
where no stucco house stood taller than a coconut tree,  
where nothing taller than a Royal Palm bordered Main Street,  
and sand beaches had no shadow.

In Maine I go about my daily life  
looking up to spruces and I feel a perfect fit.  
Yet my ex-urbanite neighbors inform me  
that all the fine museums, the gathered treasures  
of our civilizations, are found not here but in sophisticated cities.

Back when our country's wealthy men  
were gathering the finest art that human hands could make,  
the new kings built their capitols to a different scale.  
Breathing trees, not grimy scrapers of the sky  
ringed those buildings they thought handsome.  
Back then their world had half as many people,  
twice as many wild creatures as mine.

I go now to the city and find my glance smacked  
by towers fit in anywhere they could gain a purchase.  
They cling tumor-like far beyond the height  
that water rises in a tree trunk. I'm not consoled  
by the cloud of foreboding in these canyons that is dirty air,  
knowing pestilence and war can be counted on eventually  
to prune us back to proper size.

## 8. Redbud, April

Just the right week in the South:  
the redbud is in bloom.

Just the wrong year in the South:  
nobody now seems to say it the old way,  
*reyud buhd,*  
melodic phrase stretched out  
as if it were more than two plain words.

A liling Dotted Swiss of sweet magenta haze  
interlacing porcelain pure white  
of dogwood, generously laying a picnic  
spread on the blue hills under back-lit  
charmingly baby new green forest leaves.

The copperheads  
and rattlers  
are awaking,  
the sinuous same who inspired  
serpentine  
red brick walls for the gardens  
of grand columned homes here.

The misty hills of the new South  
are struck with new houses  
all the way to their tops  
raw red clay wounds seeping  
in frightening new contagion,  
bursting ancient Blue Ridge Shenandoah Appalachian skin  
not like snakes which  
slyly secede from outgrown skins,  
more like cicadas in a plague year  
loudly turning into what monstrous pox?

Remembering the girl  
who wandered here before,  
I write reluctantly,  
weeping fallen petals on the page.

## 9. The Jeweled Net

I used to think that Indra was  
a Hindu folk idea  
for the god in his palace  
under a Net of All Being

but when an image  
trembles in the cobweb,  
out from the leafy shadows  
darts my eight-eyed spider sister,  
single lens reflex supreme,

while here on my side

I'm poised with pen and pen  
and pen and pen in hand  
to bind with silken lines  
the cosmic hum in our simultaneous  
response to Indra's pluck.

## 10. Remembering

Did I remember to tell them that  
we always filled the bath tub before the power went out,  
that we went to bed at night with the dishwasher open,  
we put the washing machine upstairs  
because the pipes always froze under the house,  
especially when the wind blew from the east  
sending its cold claws prying between the pink sandstone blocks  
dragged in 1818 from rich surrounding farmland  
to lean cozy against each other  
to form the new old house foundation.

Wind from the east  
weather's a beast, I always said.  
Our dogs always figured out how to avoid  
having all four paws at once on the iron cold ground  
though Kipper was happy to curl up and sleep on the snow.  
What the barn cats did after the cows were sold I hate to think.  
did the eggs ever freeze? I don't recall.  
Did I remember to tell them that we always tied  
a little spruce on a hank of clothesline  
to send it slithering down the stove chimney  
at the first sign of frost, how the creosote smell would linger.  
(Morning radio reports of the fire department always equaled  
the weatherman's telling us how cold it was last night -  
the tragic tradeoff I could always understand.)

Nothing in life has ever since precisely equaled the quiet pleasure,  
the radiant warmth of wood stove, pot of beans singing merrily,  
loaves of bread rising before it on thumb-backed chairs.  
Always there were icy stars,  
once or twice great silent sheets of Northern Lights,



small smile of relief when he came home at last, in from the dark  
- though we always kept the cars packed with blankets, matches,  
and whatever seemed that year's new prudent measures -  
the warm kitchen where our innocent boys played,  
the same sons who so indignantly reported how once again  
they had seen their steaming breath on the way  
through the unheated parts of the house to the bathroom.  
We on the other hand were just glad to know  
that the plumbing was still unfrozen.  
"What a good story you will have one day  
To tell your children," we laughed.

Did I remember to tell him everything  
he needed - or I needed to tell  
the son who now tramps at night into that warm kitchen,  
who frets about the expense of cold?  
Greet his dear wife and darling daughters  
and I hope, who savors for just a moment the same quiet radiance,  
Warming love that perhaps heats best in the face of challenge met.

11. September 19, 2003, Naomi's Birthday

Sweet Tomorrow, on the day you are born  
blue heaven canopies us windless, shining.  
Only the hawk, the sharp-shinned hawk,  
betrays some awful urgency.

Wren in the raspberries,  
no, wide-eyed warbler,  
no, two, no four, this summer's family,  
they move across the shadowed goldenrod  
while day stars - two white butterflies - rise above the asters.

Perhaps we still aren't ready for such beauty.  
My neighbor hurries by,  
his station wagon stirring a storm of dust.  
Indifferent to this country lane  
- he prefers a store-bought landscape-  
he does not see me sitting here in brocade wrap

with iridescent diptera, bright sparks of being,  
black wasps of almost urban chic – or menace.

But come child, be charmed by such  
as the green flash of the last hummingbird  
heard before seen, felt after the shadow passes,  
come to a world of hungry innocence  
where green banners are flown  
to the glory of Allah, Yahweh, and God,  
where killing is in consequence of food, not faith.

## 12. Shoes

When I was in Costa Rica  
I bought a pair of slippers  
pinkredvioletroseturquoise  
and green as leaves, not grass I guess  
but maybe rainforest green

though the soles were printed  
*made in Guatemala*  
in the glory of those hues  
I pictured not poor women stitching together  
in *maquiladoras*

but apparel being stitched by hand  
dyed with local colors  
blossoms and beetles  
AztecMayaIncaQuechua speakers  
who grew four thousand kinds of potatoes  
whose names of tribes and empires we do not even know

now threadbare, broken, stained  
worn through to indecipherable fiber  
these are down at the heels

shoes which have rested at the back of the closet  
for some years now because I am loathe  
to let go, discard what is owed the other

those places and those peoples  
as well as who I used to be.

### 13. Nature Tourism

Kenya, *Colobus abyssinicus*

*Wazungu*, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
the black and white Colobus monkeys  
you have just glimpsed overhead in the fever trees,  
these *kuluzu* were - believe it or not -  
once considered pests, troublesome nuisances.

Lovely, aren't they?  
Elegant white mantle fringing their glossy night-black fur,  
this troop will not dance as regalia  
or lie in ornament on the lodge floor  
as once they might, but as the forest trees are cut  
refuges like ours assume a new significance.  
(And we appreciate your contributions.)

Maine, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*

Red squirrel, scolding at my hermitage door,  
how the summer people blanch to see you, wondering  
what mischief you have done inside their vacant cottage,  
your shoe button bright eyes ringed so innocently with white.  
Over your sleek red back you hold that fluffy tail  
arched until the instant when you launch  
your pocket rocket self in pure aggression at your peers.

How complex, so far beyond telling in an eco-tour  
a nature story really is.  
When our melting boreal relic island  
is thoroughly invaded by suburbia and the grey squirrels,  
who will pay to visit us rare relics  
under old spruces at the end of the road?

We can't just retreat to Canada, can we?

Oh, little forest imp, you downeast dear,  
you do not scold with near the wondrous whoop  
I heard those sad-faced monkeys make,  
but I can love you now, and so I do.

#### 14. Space Weather Space Weather Report

NASA says the other day

29 October

trick or treat,

the fourth most powerful solar flare  
ever seen (dinosaurs ask, by whom?)

came charging toward us

five million miles per hour

arriving sooner than predicted (!)

less than a single day

for that zipper cloud of cosmic arrows  
to leap a cool ninety-three million miles

to solar rain on us

storms writhing on the bright face of the sun

no less real for being unperceived

(by man)

They predicted Sun's wild cosmic ray gun

would mess up satellite navigation systems -

(All day the birds flew down and the leaves flew up

the gift of one more last warm day, local global warming)

that television broadcasts would scramble -

(No further comment)

that High-frequency voice-radio communications

would be impeded (cell phones struck dumb !)

that airplanes might be distracted -

boxcutters suddenly appearing in barf bags

on planes of all sizes, homeland insecurity

(Last night was really nutty at the nursing home

said the tired nurse hurling hateful words,

both local and cosmic flares  
wreaking terror on innocents)

Night brought celestial synaesthesia  
cool reds, sweet veils of shifting light  
brush strokes shimmering fragrant green  
across the dome of sky  
eerily silent Sound and Light show  
the Merry Dancers through the night unheard  
only echoes...poems, striking like lightning

all next day  
the words came  
trailing invisible clouds of connotation -  
charged particles, poem after poem, wholly holy whole -  
till brains cried out for a good calm rinse  
remembering the orange pumpkin peel of the moon  
bowled on its side  
sliding below the horizon just at dusk last night  
to countenance no longer  
Mischief Night's auroral antics.

## 15. Ariadne's Mark

is not as I might have thought  
the Minoan double-bladed axe  
that marked her father's palace halls,  
those back-to-back blades of keen disappointment  
slaying hopes time and again.

Princess of Knossos, Ariadne became  
the patroness of spinners  
when she gave the secret thread  
to Theseus, her lover,  
bull-dancer, gorgeous Greek.

Underground he slew Minotaur of the maze  
ambitious Theseus did,  
then carried expecting Ariadne across Aegean waves

to leave her far from family, from home,  
abandoned to the mad sorority of maenads.

It's Dionysus who wed our Ariadne  
with Corona Borealis, starry crown.  
Look overhead June nights  
by the spinning circumpolar stars,  
gift more lasting than the temporary oblivion of wine.

On a Maine morning, the path is hung  
with orb weaving spiders' webs  
flashing Ariadne's tears between the lines  
of silk and spruces,  
beauty quite reliable for handling beasts.

16. Isle Rider  
or  
Singing with Virgil\*

All those eons ago the granite boiled  
and blistered to float the magma sea,  
so now my island rides that rock  
above yet restless bay.

*Arma mareque canō*

Astride the granite shore,  
in charioteer's proud stance  
to the waves' applause  
and gull's herald cry,  
I laugh for battles won.

*Arma virumque canō*

Shades of Roman poets,  
your words outlive the Caesars  
as do my sons, whose children join  
in unspoiled island ride.

*Arma mātremque canō*

Riding the ocean aboard  
the whale of a life lived large,  
I sing of arms and of life,  
to the struggling seas,  
to the far stars,  
however long the triumph takes.

*Arma vītamque canō*

\* The first line of Virgil's epic poem, the *Aeneid*, is "*Arma virumque canō*", I sing of arms and the man, referring to the hero Aeneas who escapes the sack of Troy and comes to inaugurate the glory of Rome. You can recognize the Latin form of the word for sea, *mare*, for mother, *mater*, and *vita*, life.

17. Pearls

Did you ever think that day length,  
like a cloth coat has a proper fit?

I've tried on  
several times –  
like equatorial Africa where it's more than inconvenient  
to be caught out with lions  
past exactly half the time of day and night.  
There they know just when day begins,  
shortly after half past Six, so they speak of  
*Saa moja*, First Hour, year round.

So unlike dear Scotland's inconvenient times,  
the January struggle when afternoon tea  
needs a whiskey tot to buoy the spirits  
against a winter's evening come by Four,  
and then midsummer, oh  
those bonnie Highland moors

aglow the whole night long.

Being a temperate type  
I find the right size day comes to Maine  
mid-August, signaled by the dawn  
lobster boats once again wearing lights,  
bright shining pearls whose reflections  
trace slender lines across the dim bay  
as they head out to haul.

Reticent Yankee winter sun sets well before  
we finish paying the glory proper due  
- unlike the June challenge  
when a vain and inconsiderate sun  
keeps lifting my head from the pillow  
for what seems incessant admiration.

Now of an August evening,  
I snuggle under a light quilt  
contentedly considering inky- black  
calligraphy of spruce  
branches brushing across the blue night scroll  
and catch the first beam from the lighthouse,  
a second pearl beyond price,  
at an easy hour, embroidering  
a day in a life that fits.

## 18. Pairs

I had a friend who wanted to roast  
a goat in my honor in her native village  
at the foot of Kilimanjaro, and my brother  
had always wanted climb Mount Kilimanjaro  
so we went to East Africa together  
back when being a tourist was easier  
and we sat on that Kili roof of Africa  
overlooking the Serengeti  
and the great plains leading to the Mara



watching the red-robed Maasai with their hooved herds,  
and the even-older hordes of wildebeests  
in their vast numbers returning  
after the dry season had baked  
the Olduvai and the plains to fossil  
till the first rains and the first flowers,  
and my brother and I,  
we had never heard anything like  
the grunting and wheezing and stepping  
of the shaggy animals as far as the eye could see.

I have a pair of shoes that wheeze  
the dust of China and the soles  
are somewhat melted by Hawaii's lava flows.  
Like my brother and our right-foot-left-foot ways,  
the shoes are comfortable now,  
and good enough for Yankee granite ways.  
He lives on the lee of our island  
in Maine where the winter  
can lock up the water as dry as African clay.  
When the cold seasons passes  
he calls my bold shore to say that he hears again  
an indescribable sound, not  
the wildebeest or gnus, but rafts  
of eider ducks floating in their thousands,  
bobbing black-and-white upon the waves.  
I can hear his smile by phone across the island  
since we both know we have heard  
something like that sound before.

## **19. One Million Eight Hundred Thousand and Some**

*What were they counting on the weather radio a moment ago?  
Not right whales; we were just told by that mechanically modern  
voice that there are six right whales we should beware of running  
into – for the sake of the last right whales. Not clams or mussels or  
quahogs or whelks. We were just warned in that accentless artificial  
voice to take none of them because of the levels of red tide toxins,*

*and to telephone that number, one million eight hundred thousand  
and some, for further information.*

But one million  
must mean the little upland cranberries  
in such profusion on the sunny hill,  
not the Massachusetts kind that goes into cans,  
but good Maine stock for jelly jars,  
small with the particular true red,  
clumps that thread between the  
the silver lichens' crispness  
and the yielding middle-green of mosses,  
surprisingly cool and damp.

There is no computer-voiced word  
for the sound ripe berries make  
as they accumulate  
one atop another in the pail  
above the soft sweep of wavelets  
in the afternoon onshore breeze,  
with or without the thump of distant  
schooner sails coming about,

no describing the thrill  
of a firm globe, round and ripe  
and warm in your fingers,  
unless it be the feel of a woman's breast  
under the hand of her man.  
Our sons were born in the spring  
and sun warmth still suggests  
I smile and shed my clothes.

A Zen master once explained  
his calm because  
he ate only things that neither screamed nor ran,  
which must explain why my far-flung family  
so enjoys Thanksgiving cranberry sauce, homemade,  
from wild millions of berries  
picked in the sun by the bay.

