

## Chapter 6 Far Away



### 1. Persimmons

Wild child, I knew where persimmon  
trees grew in the sandy woods at the edge  
of the ball field just across the brook,  
a gold disc harvest lovely as pale sun in haze.  
I wanted to love the taste, but til a frost  
had touched the fruits they were stringent  
as Eve apples, and I could not swallow a single bite.

Now I know the six perfect persimmons of Mu Ch'i  
and I bargain for the fruit in a market

where they speak only Mandarin. In the mellow taste  
and cultivated beauty I sense the global garden,  
worldly paradise, richer orange-gold of setting sun,  
but I mourn the childhood wilderness quite gone.

## 2. Snow Lantern

Art of ancient Asia,  
the snow lantern  
is not a convenient storm light  
for carrying in one's pocket,

but a structure of some gravity, sculpture  
named probably not  
for the tiny snow pinnacle perched atop the knob  
though it is charming,

nor for the wide granite lid  
waiting all those months  
in the garden to bear the white  
fallen from the winter sky  
with such flare and drama.

What catches the eye  
after the storm  
is not what catches the snow.  
It's where the snow is not:

serenity exquisitely uncarved,  
the shadowed cavity with sloping sides  
just slightly out of round,

around the snow lantern, recognized  
for shedding light on the merit of restraint,  
the beauty of things we manage not to do.

### 3. Madama Butterfly

Long after Pinkerton had sailed away  
Madama Butterfly still thought she was married.  
*In bel di*, she thinks things will get better  
And she is such a good mother to his son.

The Morpho flying upriver is  
brown leaves paired on the rainforest floor  
Until the blue flash  
At night she takes the pins from her hair  
And lets it fall free.

Don't laugh  
The Spring Azure in the deer meadow  
Thinks she's a Morpho too  
For all you know, she was or will be, and he will come to her.

Luna moth, celadon  
Like the cup she offers, too fragile for her  
Samurai heart in Geisha breast  
Moon moth to flame.

She crowns him still her Monarch  
worm, jeweled chrysalis, or flown  
Can you hate the wasp  
Which eats his heart from within?

Poor Butterfly  
Pinned and fluttering she waits  
You want to cry  
But butterflies  
Don't fly in the rain.

### 4. Cold Moss Mountain

There is a temple garden in Kyoto  
Where monks have gone forth

for seven hundred years  
to clean the moss each day.  
Do they notice as they sweep,  
how lush the moss in winter?

Richer, greener, with an air  
of undeniable exuberance  
the mosses raise their stems like apprentice  
monks wrapped in their arms against the chill.  
They answer back if trod,  
still unskillful, with audible crunch.

Farther down the path  
I find a fallen constellation,  
improbable white on inky black,  
feathers, lances, stars, the  
tenting wings of the Ice Moth  
I'd never even heard of.

Crystal blades surround some holes  
at the mossy base of silent trees;  
a sentient being breathes therein.  
The Buddha smiles at my enlightenment:  
Only at this brief-day time of year  
can we novice monks make such census.

## 5. Lupine Lesson

On a Chinese scroll the Four Gentlemen,  
one for each season: Plum, Bamboo,  
Orchid, and Chrysanthemum.  
Scholar at the desk, brush in hand,  
breathes in the quiet hum of the world,  
tries not to be distracted  
by the tricks of summer solstice  
while the black ink brush lines out  
lupine leaves, bamboo-like  
Beginner's lesson.

Watch the brush curl in swift embrace  
around the private petal parts  
for the Orchid lesson—  
blue is mauve, is rosy pink.  
Daisies are perfectly open about it,  
and each stack of pastel pillow-blooms  
trembles with the acrobatics of  
golden wasps and velvet bees  
working slender rainbow lupine spires  
in a world with warmth and two of us.

6. July, 2003  
Pair of Scroll Paintings

I  
The crow kindergarten  
is at it again  
Burlbling and bawling  
in the spruces  
Once more  
bullying the eagle  
without mercy.  
In their black uniforms  
it's hard to say  
just which cohorts  
Are assailants this time,  
But probably  
it's the usual Gang of Five.  
Finally  
our national symbol  
huddling there  
against the tree trunk  
Fans its white tail,  
spreads its great wings,  
Sails off across the bay  
leaving the crows  
to find other amusements.

II

Outlined  
against the fog  
The crows are  
silently  
arranging themselves  
In the serviceberry bush,  
our Island pear,  
Sung Dynasty  
*sumi-e*  
Maine ink  
on Maine silk.  
Preening,  
arching for fruit  
amid the graceful branches  
The youngsters teeter  
and flap,  
outstretching their reach.  
For them too  
Learning to be  
is life's great challenge.

## 7. Bodhisattvahood

On becoming a woman in the 'fifties:  
I remember when I first heard  
that Jesus Christ had never told a lie,  
my young adult annoyance  
that nobody had quite explained  
in time for me to qualify  
for that elect society.

Fifty years later:  
Now, silvering woman  
of what is called A Certain Age,  
I smile at images of Kwan Yin,

her many arms reaching out  
to comfort all who cry,  
sorority into which, unbidden,  
my life so thoroughly has initiated me.

#### 8. Lichen Lesson, Buddha Beads

Humbly I acknowledge  
my daily teacher as I leave the house  
the doorstep boulder growing  
celadon rosettes of lichen  
concentric tiny beads of black  
to be counted with  
no haste, desire, despair.

#### 9. Evictions

While I admired the crimson maples  
on a golden autumn day much like today  
which finds me on a ladder  
finishing the season's chores,

mud-daubing wasps last year  
brought loads of something  
very like drab clay to plaster up  
homes for the next generation,

three neat entrances in all  
underneath the arches of a golden bridge  
carved on a plaque of Chinese red

that came home in my suitcase  
to hang above my own front door  
recycled to Downeast,

Far East far now,  
from where it screened the sun

at someone's bamboo-sheltered home  
for uncounted cycles of the seasons,

where perhaps I passed it  
on my own way down the Long River,  
where I know brown Yangtze waters  
are rising slowly, far higher than our tides.

The ancestors will forgive me;  
I waited for the wasps to hatch  
before I washed away their homes.

#### 10. Late to Meditation

Breathless our friend,  
"So sorry I'm late,"  
shedding barbs as faultlessly as a wet dog shakes,  
she threw off her coat and joined it in a chair.

Atoms of her being came trailing in,  
rushing to catch up with the body,  
her funnel cloud of personal tornado hovering  
invisible on the edge of perception.

Envy the bees their ultraviolet, perhaps they could have seen  
whether her Coriolis force had a leftward twist like the bath tub  
drain  
or the bats who could say if they heard the rising pitch of a filling  
jug, especially that final fillip topping off the narrow neck.

But I could see her smile corners gradually tucking  
themselves back up where they belonged,  
the sparkle of her Self in there once more  
as the gravel settled, the mud sank, and  
the surface calmed enough to catch the moon.

#### 11. Spruce Pagoda Ch'an



The only sound more enchanting  
than rain on the roof may be rain in the woods  
or rain on the hood of an old red rain suit  
made in China by girls whose fathers  
no longer wear rain suits of thatch  
tier upon tier like gold pagoda roofs  
above the relics of the Buddhas,  
change overtaking the unconsidered instant,  
roaring tree tops, wind approaching no color at all  
dragon seas swallowing the world -  
the Tao of autumn rain.

## 12. Tibetan Wind Chime

Sounds were melted  
Beaten thin, hung on the wind.  
The breeze on the bay  
plays silvery murmurs from which  
yaks are heard at sea level  
gentle laughter of barley harvesters  
prayers from the edge of the Himalaya  
encircling the world in compassion.

## 13. Traditional Chinese Medicine

When he listens at the lungs  
the doctor hears  
    friends drinking tea,  
    laughing under pines  
    on landscape scrolls.

## 14. Wasp Moth Encounter

With a wealth like coins  
the silver spangling of a fritillary's underwing  
quite seduced me  
until I had sat  
still among the tall white asters

long enough for  
a Zen abbot of a moth  
*Ctenucha Rōshi*  
to rearrange its sooty silken robe  
collar bright above the dusky panels  
saffron surprise  
ink-black the eyes and probing sensitivities  
– not the emerald shoulders  
but the subtlety of restraint  
pale whisper lines on gray  
an August afternoon's  
enlightenment  
while distantly  
cicada sang.

15. Guān Yīn

The brush rack with its two dragon heads askew,  
ink brushes scattered,  
told me that our calico cat had pushed her way by.

When I tried to right the rack  
twelve armed Guān Yīn tipped and cracked,  
lost an arm to the window edge.

I contemplate creating a small glass sanctuary  
for the one they call “she who hears the cries of the world”,  
recalling the rows of figures larger than life  
smiling out from glass homes  
fronted like shop windows  
in the shadowy temples all across China.

I loved their bright colors, chipped faces,  
dingy dust, incense smoke, charred paper money,  
plastic bags of worldly offerings,  
oranges and cooking oil,  
and I had thought the glass  
somewhat distancing, museum-like,

but now I comprehend what the glass says  
about the size of cats  
they must still believe in  
there in the Middle Kingdom.

*15.Small Dishes – a Feast of China, Oct 15 - November 11, 2002*

*Amusement Verse*

Passing small notebooks  
Over bright airplane seat backs  
Linking verse of friends

*Time Line*

Up and race the dark  
All bright night fly west  
Until our return  
Today remains tomorrow  
Clocks wink, day held in escrow

*Taxi Ride*

Full frontal neon,  
Light-carved and painted, wrapped in  
Bamboo scaffold lace  
This city of cranes  
Atop their night-rainbow-bright nests  
Is not your father's Shanghai

*The Great Wall*

Not even fall reds  
Paint Great China soft inside  
Cold duty, grey wall

*Wuhan*

Stone chrysanthemums  
In bonsai garden  
Red wagon tricycle cabs

Traffic radiates

*Yunnan Food*

Serpents stare from wine  
Dragon larvae fry  
Crunch small crisp sparrows  
Ornithologist despairs

*At Ganden Sumtseling Monastery*

In frigid meditation  
The monks of Zhongdian  
Dreaming fires of Buddhist Hell

*Customs Form*

Travelers return  
To the place of their beginning  
Now who do we say we are?

## 16. Spelling Lesson

Count on the Roman patricians  
perched atop their Capitoline Hill  
to give us upper case, the capital letters  
and the menial lower case,  
a helpful system for discussing  
separateness and significance.

Used when I named my dog, my doll, my babies,  
the handsome capital letters pleased me  
but when I had matured enough to  
name my fears, ambitions and resolves  
I moved up to using lower case.

We translate with upper case  
the words those ancients used to name  
the winds, the gods, the fates, and muses,  
but I'm not quite sure what to make of the Hebrews' YHWH,

(so we call it Tetragrammeton ?)  
or the Muslims' Hundred Names of Allah  
or Lao Tzu's telling fellow Chinamen  
the tao which can be named at all  
is not the Tao.

We seem to spell it Bible  
when it's ours  
and bible when it's yours;  
likewise, mine is God  
and yours are gods  
(and Chinese characters brush right by  
these questions.)

I am growing sure that  
being, life, and holy spirit  
are not plebeian notions,  
but all too grand  
for any human spelling measure.  
Amen.

## 17.Eclipse

Perfect night  
full moon  
total eclipse.

Temporarily not outshone little stars  
around the moon twinkle with odd perkiness.  
Our earth's shadow across the moon's face  
gives a reddish glow to the distant orb  
cupped in its bright crescent gleam.

By dawn the moon is again its cold silver self.  
What is it that puts me in mind  
of ice fishing - the augur's bore  
creating congress between two worlds?

Does the nearly frozen fish suspended in its dark  
even notice that round spot of bright above,  
a moon behind night clouds, a sun burning fog,  
before they pull it hooked and writhing  
up to deadly greater light?

### Privileged Lifetime

I have been allowed to see  
the conjunction of  
Jupiter wreathed with diamond  
circumjovial moons,  
Venus in her clear cool glory  
Saturn with its saucer atilt,  
sharing Galileo's gratitude.

Now the night birds sing in their travel  
Across the mist of Pleiades overhead  
and Mars comes close -  
a golden glow like rich cream  
with the willingness of wildflowers,  
Black-eyed Susans volunteering to be admired.

Next Antares, ruby heart  
of the Scorpion,  
a rival redder than Mars,  
that god of humans' war.

I haven't been in battle,  
but I don't need  
telescopes or television  
to show me  
war does not look like peace.

### 18. Delray Dreams

Palm

fronds click and rattle

fanning stars  
into the warm night.

\*

Gulf Fritillary

On fiery wings  
a fritillary shimmers  
in the white heat.

\*

Anole

No sound  
as the lizard  
steps through  
palmetto lattice  
shade.

\*

Great Egret

Great Egret  
in the mangrove –  
day moon  
plumes.

\*

Reddish Egret

Flick out your wings,  
whirling twirling  
galloping bouncing by  
on your carriage spring knees.

In my next life  
I want to come back and dance  
on all life's mud flats at low tides  
as one of you.

\*

### Swimming with Dophins

So near I see your breath,  
expression on your face,  
look in your eye  
as you round up a dinner  
zigzagging with a final twirl and splash,  
then slowly slide your sickle fin  
beneath the wave  
to leave me standing on shore  
in silence as the surf recedes.

\*

### Fast Fishes

I cannot say  
*mullet*  
quite quickly enough  
to name  
the slant  
bolt  
like lightning  
before it falls back  
in splash.

*Torpedo* is too slow  
for the dark arrow  
*snook*  
in the water  
just after the sleek fish  
has pushed the surface,



mounding water  
like a bow wave,  
but the fish  
is long gone.

\*

### Sanibel Dawn

Venus hasn't set yet,  
serene above the beach  
twinkling with flashlights  
of each first shell hunter.

\*

### Crabgrass

All night the ghost crabs  
scuttle across the starry broad-blade turf  
on tippy-toes.

At dawn the barefoot girls  
giggle at the tickle grass  
and print the twinkling dew.

\*

### Gecko

Tiny tan lizard  
runs up the wall  
and on across the ceiling,  
splay-toed, big-eyed, bug-eyed marvel,  
anti-gravity delight.

\*

### Tricolor Heron

In musky tropic dusk  
shimmering at the edge  
of mangrove shadow,  
stalks a lone heron.

Bill strikes  
blue neon  
flash.

\*

Last Flight

White birds  
-elegant egrets and ibis -  
lace  
the saffron sun  
about to slip behind the dark tracery  
edging the molten magic  
of mangrove bay.

\*

Manatee at Easter

In the warm dazzle of aquamarine  
slowly you will yourself  
from here to there  
among the sleek and gaudy powerboats.

On your giant blurry back, scars -  
a dark tale of flogging tells itself,  
an epic of innocence  
incomprehensible forgiveness  
and undeserved doom.

\*

Shadows

The moon writes

shadows on the empty beach,  
one for me  
and one for the sanderlings  
who move like a cloud,  
at the edge of my perception.

\*

Deaf, Dumb, and Blind

The fat man in the flapping shirt  
saunters down the beach  
with his cell phone and cigar

while the gaunt woman  
crunches over the seashells  
at a furious pace  
wearing headphones, a grim face,  
and not a great deal more.

\*

South Florida

Till the last bird flies,  
the last creature dies,  
pave it, drain it, dry it,  
ditch it, scrape it – buy it.

\*

My Delray

Here and there  
the time-bleached fossil sand  
peeks through around raw edges  
of the gated moats and towers of today.  
I am now the only echo  
of the single red hibiscus  
one orange and a grapefruit tree  
cool dim heart  
in the modest stucco home

of the former Florida  
candy-colored dream.

\*

Fish Crows

*The fish crows fly  
from swaying coconut palm  
to thick palmetto stands.*

*“Unh unh, unh unh, no” they cry.*

Raccoons with clever hands  
pluck oysters from the mangrove roots

*The fish crows fly*

Calusas working with shell tools  
look up to spy the Spaniards in their ships

*from swaying coconut palm*

Plantation masters push the saw grass back  
and bring slave blacks to cut the sugar cane

*to last palmetto stands*

Big Sugar bosses Caloosahatchee’s killing  
freshwater flows away at blind command

*“Unh unh, unh unh, no”*

while deaf Big Money carves the mangrove flats,  
a mangle of mansions and marinas

*the fish crows watch and cry.*

### 19. Postmarked NOT DEER ISLE

“Seen any orange blossoms yet?” Ray asks  
at the party for his retirement.

Back when he had one more winter here than I  
he taught me that’s the local name  
for the frost heave warnings they post on the roads  
this time of year.

Those bright fluorescent posters this year  
will have another message: Ray’s gone to Florida.  
He thanks me for past poems I’ve made for him,

trying to keep the banter light  
as he looks around the Parish House party  
where we're gathered over fizzy punch,  
crab finger sandwiches, and cookies.

The strapping fisherman who has so far  
been frozen out of scalloping  
by the record ferocity of this winter  
surveys our crowd, says,  
"Jeeze, my whole customer list is here."  
"Whose name is at the head of the list?" a man asks anxiously  
and we all laugh as we eye each other, calculating our chances.

But Ray sees us as his zip code  
whose intimate secrets he knows well  
though I doubt he reads our postcards.  
He's a gentle man who fits us well.  
Crisp in his government uniform,  
dapper as we see him Fourth of July  
driving the fire truck in the parade.  
His wife beside him is rumored  
to have booked a seat on the next plane out,  
eager to leave this frozen island in pursuit of fragrant flowers.

"The best ten years of my life" Ray whispers, trying to smile.  
We head out into the cold winter dark,  
leaving before he does,  
adding what we truly wish,  
"You know the return address."