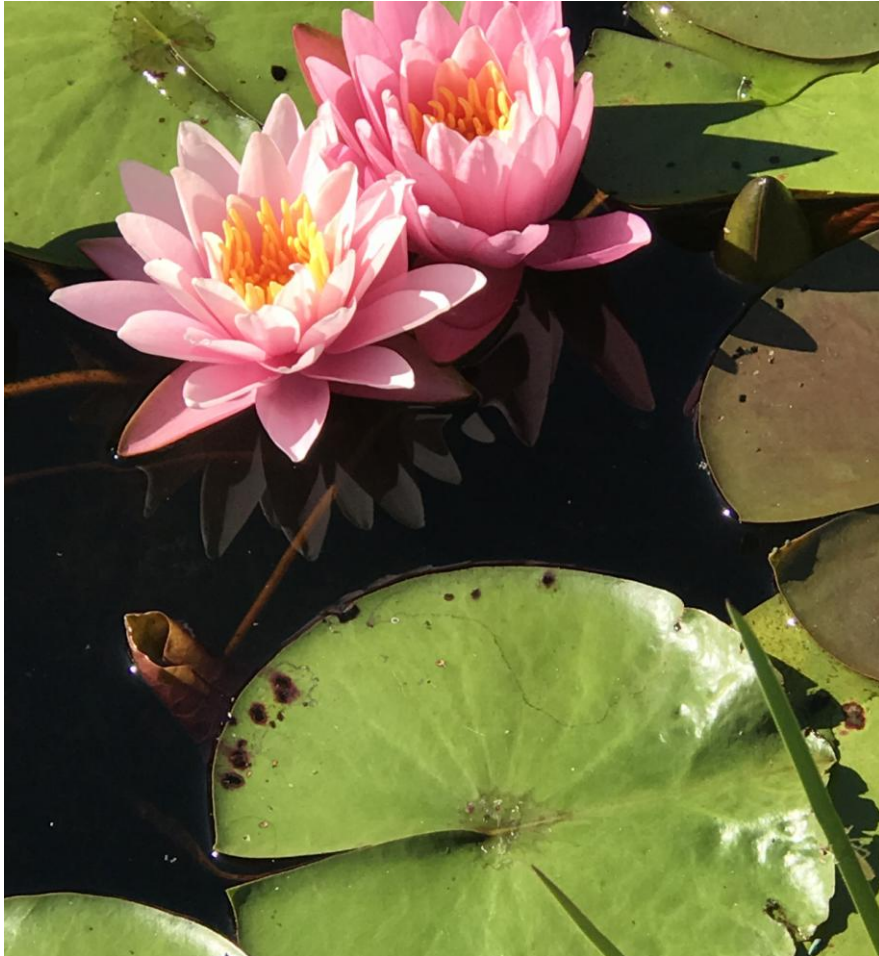


Chapter 7
No Where No When



1. Reinventing Newton's Clock

White petals of shadblow
spiral down through the spring air
to land one by one so punctually
so like sand grains sluicing
through an hourglass.
Count against the dancing leaves
bordering the blue cosmos
six seconds from cloud dancer
to carpet the ground
five petals to each blossom
ten blossoms to a bough tip cluster

hundreds to the tree.

Calculate the shadblow clock as second hand
to the apple blossoms reckoning minutes
and the cherry soon will count the hours.
Like the hourglass those dainty petals
are telling how much time is left
but unlike sand grains trickling
through the narrow throat of human time
gravity upends the hourglass
repeats this annual dance
repeats the reckoning of spring skies
repeats in turnovers of Earth time.

2. Butterfly Collection

Celastrina argiolus
Spring Azure gathers
all the loveliest of hues
then improbably alights
like a mussel pearl
on the beach at the blue bay's rim.

Lomographa vertilliata(Gn)
Spring White

Apple blossom, pear
And shadblow petal snow
drifts down the May morning
save one that flutters upward
day moth sprite.

Fritillary
Demure the violets
tucked in the lush green
of May meadow morning
with one red-gold Fritillary pausing

by the hay rake rusting there

Papillio glaucus

Bare clapboards silvered
by time and winter
but by the door a lilac
the languid dazzle of a swallowtail
New England economics.

Actias luna

Who first uttered the phrase
'nearly unbelievable good fortune"
must have heard organ toccatas
and wondered that there was room for us
in a world so sensuous with pale orchids
and pale green celadon of the Luna moth.

Strobe light chevrons lift from
the woods road gravel
as fog gives way to summer sun
spear-marked blacks the common moth
that flies by day yet no one sees.

3. Silence of Slime Molds

In the still shadows of the spruce forest
on a hot and humid
end of August afternoon,
spattered on the mosses
and slouching on stumps
are stalagmites in bewildering profusion,
lollipops and rock flows in miniature,
ivory, yellow, purples drab and nearly black.

Are such static beings live?
Most inscrutably yes,
these *myxomycetes*, the slime molds.
Animal, their plasmodia swarmed
when I was not looking
across the forest floor
like animated egg white,
or yolk threads, depending on the species,
but surely plant now blossoming surreal
to seed a further generation.

'It' or 'they', these cells of being, life?
They climb upon each others' shoulders,
wry tumblers that defy us to assign them
scientific labels and compartments.
Perhaps these ancient slime molds
are still deciding which way they'd best evolve.

In the muggy quiet of today
I sense the *myxomycetes* are considering,
carefully measuring pros and cons
of each contingent future.
It gives one pause
in the green and silent heat.
But why so breathless, waiting world?
The outcome
won't be ours to see.

4. Cherry Tree

Future feels a burden,
the weight of visioning alternatives,
the past an insubstantial pleasure -
sorting through that vast collection
of joys
and not.

For now I want freedom,
unshadowed leisure

to hold out my apron
catching bolts from the sun,
words plummeting like hailstones
day and night, dreams
the half-sisters of poems
the Muses send.

Coarse tea bowl shards gold-mended,
the chick steps out from shell debris;
the cracked old head lets in more light.
In the flush of its last spring
the gnarled cherry tree
blooms with an exuberance
it's been aiming its whole life toward.

5. Melting

It's the blue glow in the ski pole's hole,
the snowshoe's lattice print,
the birch trees' brush-stroked shadows,
under delicate hues of the first spring sky

the crisp crackle sound in the woods
as branches let go their ice coats,
the offstage rustle like large ladies' skirts
before snow clumsy thumps
from spruce bough to the snow below

the quick calls of an airborne origami, crows overhead,
the red squirrels' tightly wound chatter between their tandem runs,
silver splash of smelts hurling themselves up the newly open stream
while unseen, unheard, sap rises in the trees

and we know it's maple season by the particular sound
of corn snow, that translucent rattle of the old days -
wooden skis, undershirts - and maple wax
dribbled on a pan of it, making melting

even into the mud of the universe
seem a good thing, although we rue
the necessity of ever having to let go.

6. Old-fashioned Love Affair

I used to live with
an apple tree on a farm
far upstate where
clouds raced overhead in long rows
across crisp wide blue skies.

Until a friend invited me over
to pick apples echoing in a pail
under her gracious Baldwin tree
I'd forgotten how much I loved
to reach for the perfect one
hanging nearly out of reach,
choose among windfalls
by some mysterious attraction,
all curves and blush,
admire the calm perfection
of a well-pruned tree,
smell pie baking in the oven
just when it's ready.

The friend promised me a reunion
next fall and I asked her over
to my side of this evergreen island
to pick all the fir tips she can use
for wreaths and garlands
for her Christmas.
We'll go tipping
just about the first light snow
and then come in to the fire
for tea and talk
about our former lives.

7. Pome, a Nature Poem

The concert pianist knows
the fingers know
how to play
so what are mine
telling me
when they keep typing
p-o-m-e
when I was thinking poem?

Apple swells
ripe around the fertile
seeds of its invisible sex
but Eve knows
the troubles that
can mean
serpents in the garden
wormy apples.

Don't you
mean the caterpillar
of a humble coddling moth?
- the persistent gnawing
that will be a poem
may have found itself
just the apt
or apple
metaphor.

8. Ratchety Clatter

I relish
ratchety clatters
of kingfisher, crow,
cicada, and jay,
especially that grand

stentorian rattle
when raven announces me
coming into his woods
showing no more surprise

than the elderly neighbor whose brief startle
I still remember
at my annual childhood Halloween prank
- when I pulled the string that
screeched
the teeth of the wooden spool
against his window glass
before I parted the bushes and ran away
laughing wildly plunging through the rustling leaves.

Ah, we rackety ones,
we never stop
our antic chuckling
through all the shadows
of the woody world.

9. Onomatopopcorn

clink

plunk
pop pop
pause
here come the popcorn poems
bend down, ear close
can you hear that flowing.
racketing under the lid
when the kernels get hot, hot, heck it's hot
hear them corn babies
muffled laughter stomping hootin' hoedown
torrid tango fartin' frenzy in there
temporary
cease fire -
lift the lid

cautious
peek POW ZAP
MAJOR missile action
got no calories, mostly metaphor
sultan of Similes, shake it like a man
on the edge of total burn up
win or lose it all
fill the bowl
to over
 flowing.

10. Sleeping with the Dictionary

A bright red dictionary spends the night,
every night, by my bed, within easy compass of my arm.

I think of that calf bearer of the ancient Greeks
who each day lifted the calf and then
the man could carry the ox upon his shoulders.
My vocabulary seems to be ever increasing,
but my wrist sometimes quails in protest,
“You’re not as young as you were, my dear.”

(Though my fine and shiny dictionary grows no less ardent,
I would worry about my aging,
outgrowing my lexicon,
but I’m having an expansive affair
with the computer downstairs.)

Some people express a strong preference
for a dictionary that will lie open, flat.
I confess I respond to the crinkle of turning pages,
the gaudy gold of the cover print,
seduced by any synonym that volunteers itself to my tongue.

Oh, dear dictionary, for you I bear
the scarlet letters to my heart,
satisfied night after night,

sleeping with the dictionary.

11. Solstice Song for the Sunshine Girls

God, She is black.
Look up. She is vast.
From her great galactic womb
she births the twinkling stars –
wee sparks in abyssal dark,
small glow against the cold.

Like a lantern parade let us go forth,
Sisters, holding out our hands and hearts.
Celestial fireflies alight, and
metaphysical fireworks cascade,
not dissipating but miraculously

responding to the magnetism of love,
every flicker and humble glint
funneling into the fragile vessel
warm with trembling life
that is our daughter Selves.

12. Silver Night

Intellectually apprehending
not only cycles
but seasons of the moon,
I have lived enough summers
now to know just where to expect
a moon at midnight.

But in the thick hush
of summer fog
the lustrous moon astounds,
phantom pearl
exerting its magic magnetism

with faint, inexorable glow
intimate as love,
grand as gods.

13. 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 tilt
earning Galileo's gratitude.

Now the night birds sing in their travel
through familiar mist of Pleiades overhead
and Mars comes close -
a golden glow like rich cream
with the willingness of wildflowers,
like 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've never been in battle
but I do not need
telescopes or television
to show me clearly
war does not look like peace.

14. Japanese Suite

**Furuike ya
Kawazu tobikomu
Mizu no oto**

**old pond...
a frog leaps in
water's sound**

Basho (1643 -94)

from The Haiku Handbook, How to Write, Share, and Teach
Haiku

William J. Higginson, Kodansha International, 1985, translated by
William J. Higginson

**Ike araba,
Tonde basho ni
Kikasetai**

**Should a pond be here,
I'll jump in
To let Basho hear it.
-Gai**

Sengai (1750-1837)

from Sengai Master Zen Painter, by Shokin Furuta, Kodansha
International, 1985, translated by Reiko Tsukimura

Ikeni yururu

three hundred years of nights

-

**Tsukino inochiya
Towa narite**

**still pond water trembles
under moon breath**

Marnie - 1939-

Translated into Japanese by Kimiko Shimazu

19. Outdoor Haiku

Riding on my thumb
a spider gets both wind and sun
as the screen door shuts.

Sun rises, birds sing
morning poems come -
a day's work feels done by noon.

Broken tree across the road -
the wind came hammering down the bay
to post a winter warning.

Entomologist's Collection
Poem on the page –
pin and bottle to capture
the two-second now

20. Vernal Congress, Salamander Big Night

8:30 PM, April 26
I'm standing in the rain
watching
 Ambystoma maculatum congress,
as they say with irony or discretion.

I suppose I
could time
 the intervals
at which a snaky head breaks
water to gasp a breath of air,

or measure
 the temperature
of the clear pool with its litter
of winter-worn leaves,

or hypothesize
 on the gender of the large, heavy brown ones,
the shiny blacker lean ones.

or calculate
 how many dozen it takes
to make the seething softballs here.

Voyeur, scientist,
figuring words
 to tell about the nudgings,
 pawings,
 writhings

—you're not invited to the secret rite.
Just watch.

The only sound in the wet dark
is the gentle splash of rain,
drops dimpling and geysering above
the domino stars of the salamander backs.

The creatures float and sink:
a languor utterly without guile,
a twirl and twine unarmored, enamored.

My flashlight's gleam writhes too
with a steam of my mammal breath.
Light glances over the dark pool
through shrubbery hung with lichen lace,
onto naked dripping spruce trunks.

Wraith wavering with my breathing—
the shimmer that is them, oblivious to my light—
I could no more bring myself to stamp my foot
than reach a hand into their world:
Touch the magic mirror and the image vanishes.

They have disappeared, the dinosaur dancers,
wee folk gone by dawn, Cinderellas
of a Brigadoon that comes when
the maples haze red with bloom
and the hermit thrush comes back to sing,
yesterday and tomorrow.

21. Wind's Eye

House creaks
Rain lines down the window glass
Some great invisible Hand in very bad mood

grabs at the trees
nearly jerking them up by the roots,
snaps at the power lines
threatens and snarls.
Wind from the East,
Weather's a beast.

II

The sun appears,
out inspecting the
wake of temper-tatters
strewn down the center of the road.
Eye of the storm, what does it see,
smiling benignly, no hint of contrition?
Shelley and Keats and peers
spent so much Victorian fervor
addressing the rocks, birds and urns
that as Grandfather would say,
You dassn't say that anymore.

III

Lying like a plank
in the shuddering dark
listening for the roof to blow in or blow off
I apologize to Wind
for comparing it
to insincere friends,
treacherous workers, spatting sibs,
defensive spouses countering on on and on -
If only the pressing wind will
round once again
and just move on
so will I.

22. December Dream

It is our ritual annually
to cut a bayside spruce

and bring it in the house
as pagan Christmas tree.

We hang aloft
a pair of dainty blown glass deer—
childhood treasures, the stag and doe
who stand watch as we sleep.

Like unicorns this golden pair
descends on that longest night
to celebrate, dancing on moonlight,
weaving silver ribbons of scintillations
across the waiting bay.

Come dawn,
along the rocky shore
the glassy shards of tinkling ice
whisper with wavelets a broth
like breath, a pulse and ebb like beating heart.

The ancient ocean echoes yet
recalling when and where
the old dark sea
begat the golden child,
the miracle of life.

23. Open Sesame

Way back in Early On
eons of sunsets brought forth
an alchemy of energy,
ancient enduring traded
for evanescence of the living kind.

For the possibility of plants
we left behind the crystal lattice of permanence.
Becoming connoisseurs of change,

enamored of the opportunity
of ebb and flow, we tried trees,
trading seconds for still-transient centuries.

Evolution is an endless barter,
Ali Baba's shadow in the treasure cave,
infinity beyond us.

24. Sign Language

I know enough KiSwahili
to understand the guides' discussing
which tree held a leopard.

At the Island potluck
I saw the smiling husband sign
what he heard for his deaf wife.

Acacia shadows on a leopard's back,
that loving flutter of hands,
play of light on the morning bay,
shifting geometry of a flight of birds
just above the waves:

I am an eager student
of the holy wordless languages
spoken by our world.

25. 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.

26. Tooth Fairy's Gift

The phone—and then from far away,
a small voice, "Did you know that I lost my first tooth today?"
So tonight my son, the dad of the voice in question
Will with his wife a family milestone mark.

I very much doubt my grandson will relinquish
that sweet bit of ivory to the tooth fairy,
tucking it under his pillow to be tucked away
by the same mysterious force that makes
sock widows in the laundry, black holes in the universe.

What sort of elephant graveyard is hiding out there?
Who still has one of their baby milk teeth,
in fringed and beaded pouch hung round the neck
or tucked away in a silver box in a bureau drawer?

I know you can't trust an empty hole
recalling the odd summer no Monarch came back.
I don't enjoy the empty eye of hurricane or nor'easter
or the gap that is cruel indifference, absent altruism
but I welcome the space/time of no pain,
that one spring day warm with no blackflies,
and I smile at the thought of my grandson's new grin,
the sweetest gapping innocent smile.

27. Rebirthdates

Yesterday the well-meaning man at the post office asked,
“Done any skating lately?”
“Not yet, but I’ll ski when we get snow” I reply,
adding I’m now no more likely to fall than anyone else,
perhaps just less likely to catch myself.
“It’s not your balance I was thinking about,” he says, “but courage.”
Since I cracked my head on the night of the Superbowl,
I can count on recurring hoopla to remind us all
of the anniversary of my accident.

Two weeks ago was the anniversary of the day the doctor rushed
me out of my mother’s womb
I like to think a birthday girl gets to make all the choices,
for one day at least,
but this year when my birthday came, I was busy
with a meeting and the restaurants were all closed,
for island, winter, Monday.
So many choices we do not get to make.

Today begins that period I feel almost owed a make up
for the time I missed, in ICU, so nearly checked out it was a week
before I woke.
Doubly delighted I am today that I awake with a poem singing in
that dented head,
that today I have a breakfast date with friends,
the same who celebrated my first rebirthday, and probably
none of us will mention the elephant on skates
though we don’t pretend it isn’t there.

I have an annual week now to do coma-catch up,
pay two-fold notice to small pleasures,
savor satisfactions, celebrate opportunity,
cross-country ski, with a helmet, and a smile.

I have central heat and indoor plumbing; my body loves its morning shower
-taking on faith the lavender soap's perfume since my olfactory nerve never reknit-
but eyes enjoy African violets so richly bright,
taste has no trouble with the nectar of Honeybell orange,
fruits of modern convenience just as the respirator, x-ray, helicopter to which I owe this all.

28. Still Point, Autumn

A thrill of winter dread today; whole air poised in balance
the wan perfection of late autumn afternoon
under the pressed petal of an old moon.

Perfectly I remember the earth roar
the down hill dump truck, railroad train racing
behind my desk chair and the radio reported
what it had measured on the Richter scale.

Surely I would have heard the globe skid
had the world stilled while I wasn't looking.
I once knew a still point in quiet time
when I had ceased to breathe - in the ICU and it was not quiet.

I remember the nurse when they had succeeded in jumpstarting
my breathing once again, when I regained consciousness.
She was quite curt with me. I did not seem to her
to be taking things like life quite seriously enough?

So how is it possible that not one single
Frost-crisped leaf on the golden birches
so much as hints a gesture? No dangle, no song
no sway, not even gentle breath of grass.

Even sunlight has the gleam of reduced dimension
now as if existence is a faded photograph.
What a banner of relief, that lone indifferent chickadee

flying across the empty space from birch to birch

minding its own business like an errant thought
pranking in to the perfect light of the sitting mind
sweet unfrightened blur across the still point of meditation.

29. Fitting Room

I who hurried so into this world
- born just under four pounds -
first wore sweet-faced bunny booties
with my tiny bonnet, doll-like, pink
rimmed with ribbons and rosebuds.

I would not have guessed
except or all those post-war childhood
years of boys' flannel hand-me-down pajamas
that they might have preferred a boy,
my golden loyal little bother, first.

Then I graduated in an eighth grade dress
whose tiny stars spangled
pale and sheer blue voile.

By appointment to the Queen
they made my father's daughter
a clan plaid lady's kilt

and it was he who slipped over my head
the velvet hood to go with
academic mortar board.

And he who gave me away in beaded blue gown
to wed in snow-white lace and satin,
"married in blue; always be true"
As both my mother and Gram'momma did.

Twice to bear dear sons I gladly wore
those hospital Johnny gowns,

and twice more for surgeries
reluctantly I donned the unbecoming fashion.

Eyes, ears, and skin called for wearing hats
though I've always chafed at lids in life.
My feet would rather not wear shoes.
I keep forgetting where I slipped them off.

But I'm getting the knack of how to dress
Tomorrow I will wear the silver sea,
cloud-painted sky by day,
and all the starry crown at night
cool earth, green moss, a rustling tree
where wrens in shadows sing.
They fit me fine just now.

30. Poem

Each time
the printed page goes out
I think
this time could be the last,
though I shake my mind
to get your attention
like an empty basket
or a white sheet.

Poem possibility,
you sit
just off-stage
ready to say
Okay,
no more,
the end.