



JOYFUL NOISE  
*Poems for Two Voices*

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*illustrated by Eric Beddows*

A Charlotte Zolotow Book



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NOTE

The following poems were written to be read aloud by two readers at once, one taking the left-hand part, the other taking the right-hand part. The poems should be read from top to bottom, the two parts meshing as in a musical duet. When both readers have lines at the same horizontal level, those lines are to be spoken simultaneously.



## Grasshoppers

---

Sap's rising

Grasshoppers are  
hatching out

Autumn-laid eggs

Young stepping

Ground's warming

Grasshoppers are  
hatching out

splitting

into spring

(3)

Grasshoppers  
hopping

high

Grassjumpers  
jumping

Vaulting from  
leaf to leaf  
stem to stem  
plant to plant

leapers

Grass-

bounders

springers

Grass-

soarers

Leapfrogging

longjumping

grasshoppers.

Grasshoppers  
hopping

Grassjumpers  
jumping  
far

leaf to leaf  
stem to stem

Grass-  
leapers

bounders

Grass-  
springers

soarers

Leapfrogging

longjumping

grasshoppers.



## *Water Striders*

---

Whenever we're asked  
if we walk upon water  
we answer

To be sure.

Whenever we're asked  
if we walk upon water  
we answer  
Of course.

It's quite true.

Whenever we're asked  
if we walk on it often  
we answer  
Quite often.

All day through.  
Should we be questioned  
on whether it's easy  
we answer

A snap.

Should we be told  
that it's surely a miracle  
we reply  
Balderdash!

Nonsense!  
Whenever we're asked  
for instructions  
we always say  
  
and do as we do.

Whenever we're asked  
if we walk on it often  
we answer

Each day.

Should we be questioned  
on whether it's easy  
we answer  
Quite easy.

It's a cinch.  
Should we be told  
that it's surely a miracle  
we reply

Rubbish!

Whenever we're asked  
for instructions  
we always say  
Come to the pond's edge

(6)

and then put down another,

Believe me, there's no call  
at all to be nervous

But by that time our student  
no matter how prudent  
has usually

sunk from view.

Put down one foot  
  
resting upon the thin film  
on the surface.

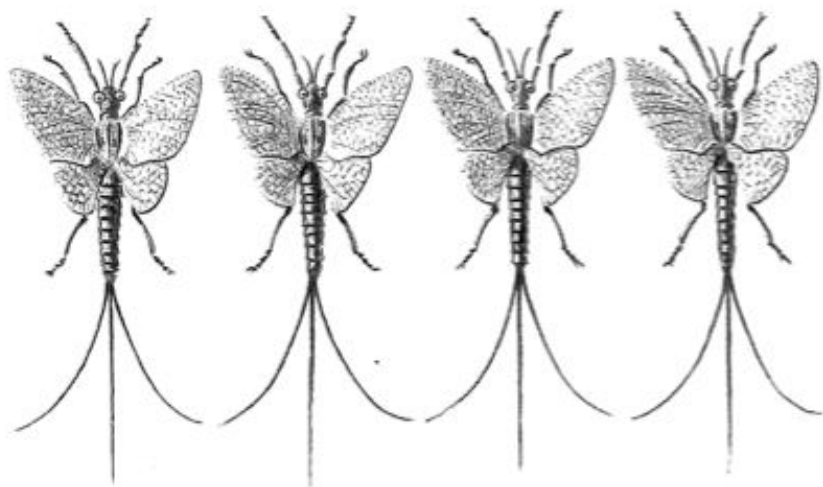
as long as you're reasonably  
mindful that you—

But by that time our student

has usually  
don't ask me why  
sunk from view.



(7)



## *Mayflies*

---

Your moment

Mayfly month

Your hour

Mayfly year

Your trifling day

Our life

We're mayflies  
just emerging

We're mayflies  
just emerging

(8)

rising from the river,  
born this day in May

and dying day,

this single sip of living

We're mayflies  
by the millions  
fevered

rushed

We're mayflies  
swarming, swerving,  
rising high

courting on the wing,

We're mayflies  
laying eggs  
our final, frantic act.

birthday

this particle of time

all that we're allowed.  
We're mayflies  
by the millions

frenzied

no redwood's centuries  
to squander as we please.

We're mayflies  
swarming, swerving,

then falling,

then mating in midair.

We're mayflies  
laying eggs

(9)

light's weak

We're mayflies  
lying dying  
floating by the millions

from which we sprung  
so very long ago

back when we were  
young.

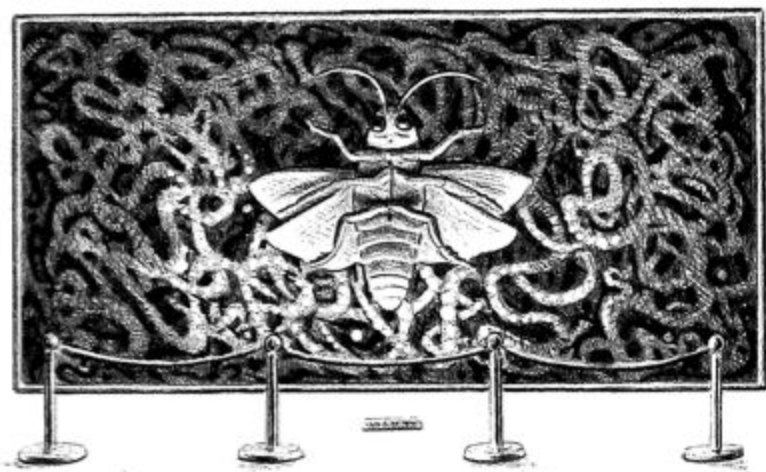
Sun's low

in haste we launch them  
down the stream.

We're mayflies  
lying dying

on the very stream

this morning  
back when we were  
young.



## *Fireflies*

---

Light

Night

is our parchment

Light

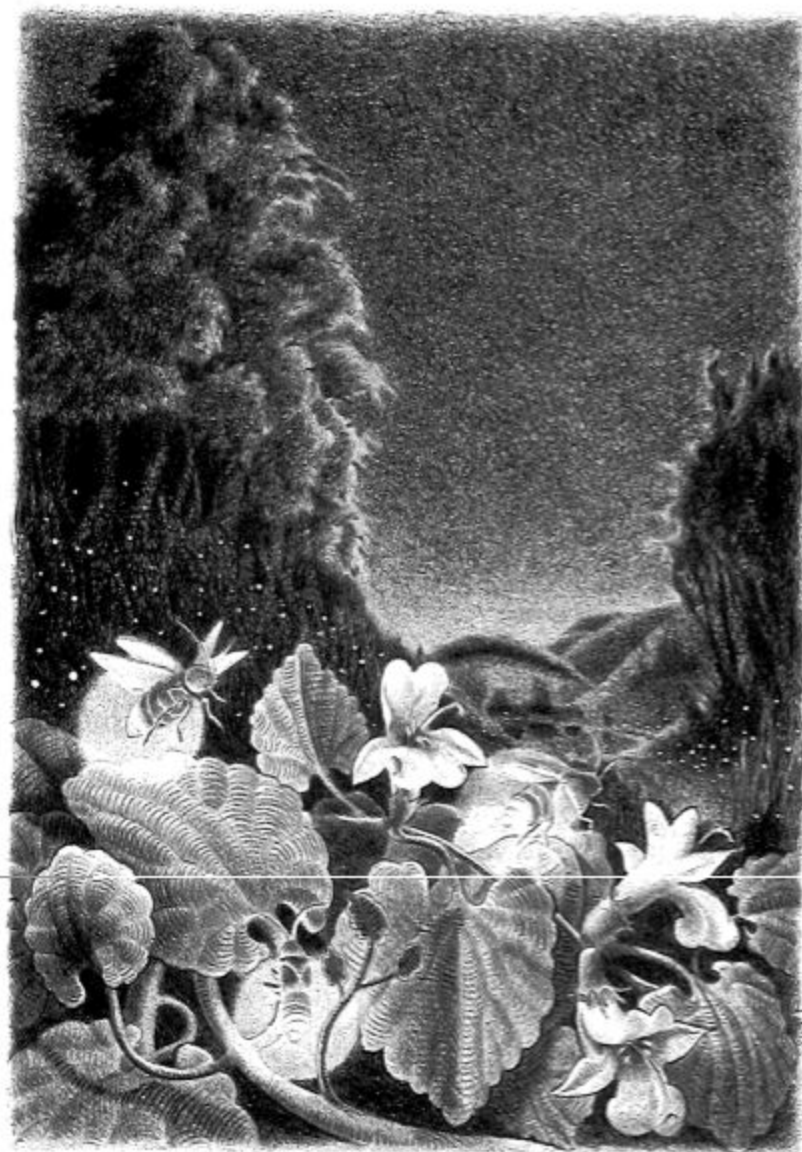
is the ink we use

Night

We're

fireflies

(11)



(12)

fireflies  
flitting  
  
fireflies  
glimmering  
  
glowing  
Insect calligraphers  
practicing penmanship  
  
Six-legged scribblers  
of vanishing messages,

flickering  
  
flashing  
  
fireflies  
gleaming  
  
Insect calligraphers  
  
copying sentences  
Six-legged scribblers  
  
fleeting graffiti

Fine artists in flight  
adding dabs of light  
  
Signing the June nights  
as if they were paintings  
  
flickering  
fireflies  
fireflies.

Fine artists in flight  
  
bright brush strokes  
Signing the June nights  
as if they were paintings  
We're  
fireflies  
flickering  
fireflies.







## *Book Lice*

---

I was born in a  
fine old edition of Schiller

We're book lice  
who dwell  
in these dusty bookshelves.  
Later I lodged in  
Scott's works—volume 50

While I started life  
in a private eye thriller  
We're book lice  
who dwell  
in these dusty bookshelves.

While I passed my youth  
in an Agatha Christie



We're book lice  
attached  
despite contrasting pasts.  
One day, while in search of  
a new place to eat

We're book lice  
who chew  
on the bookbinding glue.  
We honeymooned in an  
old guide book on Greece

We're book lice  
attached  
despite contrasting pasts.

He fell down seven shelves,  
where we happened to meet  
We're book lice  
who chew  
on the bookbinding glue.

We're book lice  
fine mates  
despite different tastes.  
So we set up our home  
inside Roget's Thesaurus

We're book lice  
adoring  
despite her loud snoring.  
And there we've resided,  
and there we'll remain,

We're book-loving  
book lice

which I'm certain I read  
in a book some months back  
that opposites  
often are known  
to attract.

I missed Conan Doyle,  
he pined for his Keats  
We're book lice  
fine mates  
despite different tastes.

Not far from my mysteries,  
close to his Horace  
We're book lice  
adoring  
despite his loud snoring.

He nearby his Shakespeare,  
I near my Spillane  
We're book-loving  
book lice  
plain proof of the fact

that opposites  
often are known  
to attract.



## *The Moth's Serenade*

---

Porch  
light,  
hear my plight!  
I drink your light  
like nectar  
  
by day  
Gaze in your eyes  
all night  
Porch light!

Porch  
light,  
hear my plight!  
  
like nectar  
Dream of you  
by day  
  
all night  
Porch light!

(18)

I am  
your seeking  
circling  
sighing  
lovesick  
knight  
You are

my soul's  
desire  
my prize

Porch light!  
My shining star!

"Keep back," they say  
I can't!  
"Don't touch," they say

Porch light!  
Let's clasp  
Let's kiss  
Let's marry for a trice!

Bright paradise!

I am  
  
seeking  
circling  
sighing

You are  
my soul's  
desire  
my prize  
my eyes'  
delight

Porch light!

My compass needle's North!

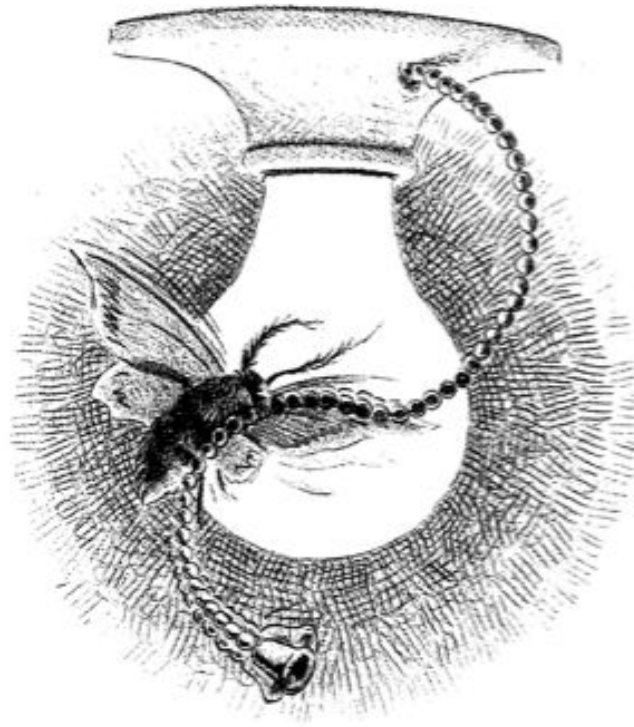
"Keep back," they say  
  
"Don't touch," they say  
I must!

Porch light!  
Let's kiss  
Let's clasp  
Let's marry for a trice!

(19)

Porch light!  
Let's meet  
Let's merge  
Let's live for love!  
For light!

Porch light!  
Let's merge  
Let's meet  
For light!





## *Water Boatmen*

---

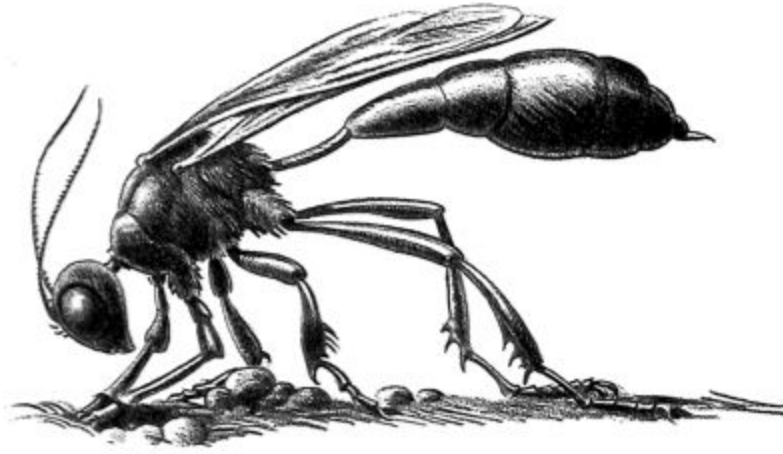
“Stroke!”  
We’re water boatmen  
“Stroke!”  
“Stroke!”  
We’re cockswain calling  
“Stroke!”  
“Stroke!”  
and oarsmen straining  
“Stroke!”

and six-man racing shell  
rolled into one.

“Stroke!”  
worn-out from rowing  
“Stroke!”  
“Stroke!”  
of this deep millpond  
“Stroke!”

and shout the order  
“Rest!”

We’re water boatmen  
“Stroke!”  
“Stroke!”  
Bound for the bottom  
“Stroke!”  
“Stroke!”  
where we arrive  
“Rest!”



## *The Digger Wasp*

---

they will never  
gaze on me.

when they're emerging  
next July.  
So it must be.

I will never  
see my children,

I'll have died

So it must be.

I'm digging now  
for their protection,

far underground,  
they'll recognize  
my deep affection.

stung and paralyzed,

for them to eat  
they'll know as well  
that I was wise.

in spite of every  
interference,

and thieving beetles,  
they'll discern  
my perseverance.

Yet, when they  
behold the home

safe and snug

they'll recognize  
my deep affection.  
When they hatch  
and find a caterpillar,

left by me

they'll know as well  
that I was wise.  
When they learn  
I'd dragged it there

weeds and rocks

they'll discern  
my perseverance.  
While, cocooned,

safe from snow  
and ice and chill,

and thank me for  
my formidable  
digging skill.

to climb up from their cells

and fly away  
my young will  
know me well.

never to be looked upon,

in replica  
and know that they, in turn,  
were cherished

whose face and form  
they never saw.

they pass the winter

they'll perceive

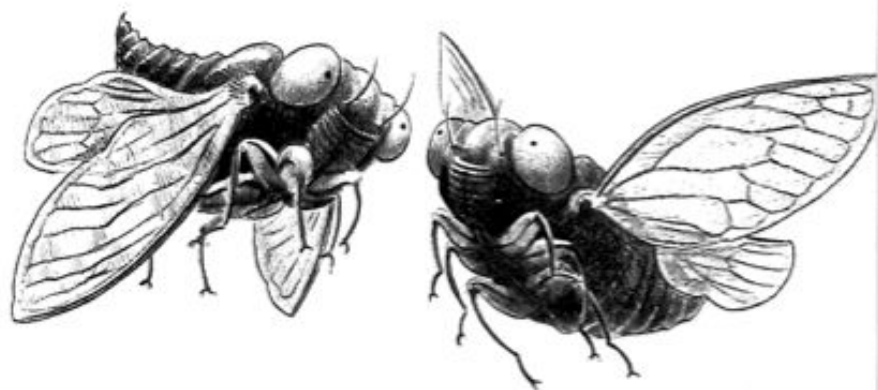
my formidable  
digging skill.  
By the time they're  
ready, next July,

and break the burrow's seal

my young will  
know me well.  
When they care  
for their own children,

they'll feel my love  
in replica

by the mother digger wasp  
whose face and form  
they never saw.



## *Cicadas*

---

Afternoon, mid-August

Two cicadas singing

Five cicadas humming

Thunderheads northwestward

Twelve cicadas buzzing

the mighty choir's  
assembling

Two cicadas singing

Air kiln-hot, lead-heavy

Five cicadas humming

Twelve cicadas buzzing

Up and down the street

the mighty choir's  
assembling

(26)

Shrill cica-  
das  
droning

*Three years*  
spent underground

in darkness  
Now they're breaking ground

splitting skins  
and singing

rejoicing

fervent praise

their hymn  
sung to the sun  
Cicadas

Ci-  
cadas  
droning  
in the elms  
*Three years*

among the roots  
in darkness

and climbing up  
the tree trunks

and singing  
Jubilant

cicadas  
pouring out their  
fervent praise  
for heat and light  
their hymn

Cicadas  
whining

(27)



whin-  
ing

whir-  
ring

pulsing  
chanting from the treetops  
sending  
forth their  
booming  
boisterous  
joyful noise!

ci-  
cadas  
whirring

ci-  
cadas  
pulsing

chanting from the treetops  
sending  
forth their  
booming  
joyful noise!



## *Honeybees*

---

Being a bee

is a pain.

I'm a worker  
I'll gladly explain.

I'm up at dawn, guarding  
the hive's narrow entrance

Being a bee  
is a joy.

I'm a queen

I'll gladly explain.  
Upon rising, I'm fed  
by my royal attendants,

then I take out  
the hive's morning trash

then I put in an hour  
making wax,  
without two minutes' time  
to sit still and relax.

Then I might collect nectar  
from the field  
three miles north

or perhaps I'm on  
larva detail

feeding the grubs  
in their cells,  
wishing that *I* were still  
helpless and pale.

I'm bathed

then I'm groomed.

The rest of my day  
is quite simply set forth:

I lay eggs,

by the hundred.

I'm loved and I'm lauded,  
I'm outranked by none.

(30)

Then I pack combs with  
pollen—not my idea of fun.

Then, weary, I strive

to patch up any cracks  
in the hive.

Then I build some new cells,  
slaving away at  
enlarging this Hell,  
dreading the sight  
of another sunrise,  
wondering why we don't  
all unionize.

Truly, a bee's is the  
worst  
of all lives.

When I've done  
enough laying

I retire

for the rest of the day.

Truly, a bee's is the  
best  
of all lives.



(31)



## Whirligig Beetles

We're whirligig beetles  
we're swimming in circles,  
black backs by the hundred.



We're spinning and swerving  
as if we were on a  
mad merry-go-round.

We never get dizzy  
from whirling and weaving  
and wheeling and swirling.



We're whirligig beetles  
we're swimming in circles,  
black backs by the hundred.

We're spinning and swerving  
as if we were on a  
mad merry-go-round.



We never get dizzy  
from whirling and weaving  
and wheeling and swirling.

The same goes for turning,



The same goes for turning,  
revolving and curving,  
gyrating and twirling.  
The crows fly directly,  
but we prefer spirals,  
arcs, ovals, and loops.



"As the whirligig swims"

circular  
roundabout  
backtracking  
indirect  
serpentine  
tortuous  
twisty,  
best possible  
route.

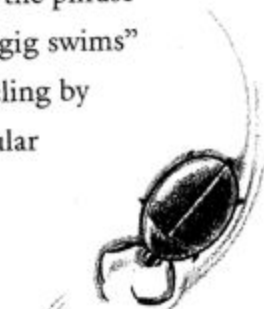


revolving and curving,  
gyrating and twirling.



The crows fly directly,  
but we prefer spirals,  
arcs, ovals, and loops.  
We're fond of the phrase  
"As the whirligig swims"  
meaning traveling by  
the most circular

roundabout  
backtracking  
indirect  
serpentine  
tortuous  
twisty and  
turny,  
best possible  
route.





## Requiem

---

Grant them rest eternal

Maple moths

Let light undying  
shine upon them.

green darners

rest eternal

Carolina sphinx moths

Grant them rest eternal

Let light undying  
shine upon them.

Praying mantises

rest eternal

brown darners

light undying.

Grasshoppers

great crested

three-banded

Katydid

northern

Cave crickets

mole crickets

tree crickets

field crickets

rest eternal

light undying.

This past night

we had the fall's first

killing frost.

Black-winged damselflies

light undying.

Grasshoppers

spur-throated

Katydid

round-headed

gladiator

Cave crickets

mole crickets

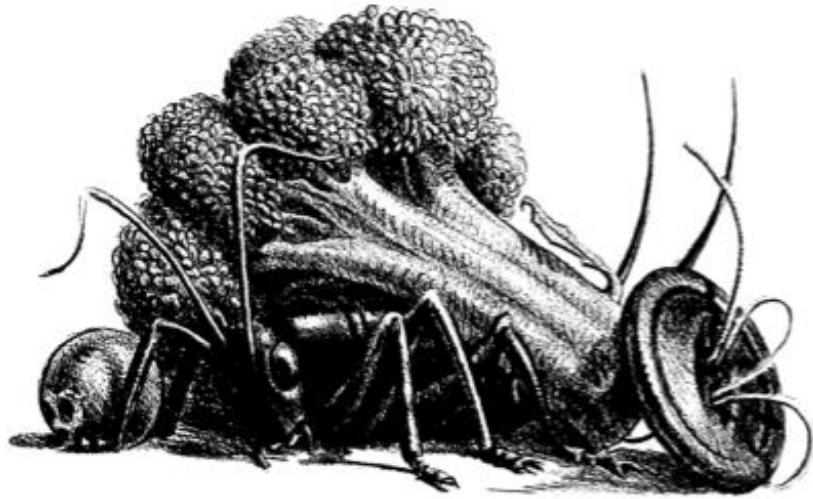
tree crickets

Grant them

rest eternal

Give them

light undying.



## *House Crickets*

---

We don't live in meadows  
crick-et  
or in groves

crick-et

We're house crickets  
living beneath  
this gas stove  
crick-et

crick-et  
Others may worry

(36)

crick-et  
about fall

crick-et  
Spring, to house crickets,  
crick-et  
means no more

crick-et  
Summer's the season  
crick-et  
for pie crumbs:

crick-et  
Pumpkin seeds tell us  
crick-et  
fall's arrived

crick-et

We're scarcely aware  
of the seasons at all  
crick-et

crick-et

than the time  
when fresh greens  
once again grace the floor  
crick-et

crick-et

peach, pear, boysenberry,  
quince, apricot, plum  
crick-et

crick-et

while hot chocolate spills  
hint that it's  
winter outside.

(37)

No matter the month we stay well fed and warm,	No matter the month unconcerned about cold fronts and wind chill and storms.
For while others are ruled by the sun in the heavens,	For while others are ruled whose varying height brings the seasons' procession,
we live in a world of fixed Fahrenheit crick-et	we live in a world crick-et thanks to <i>our</i> sun:
our unchanging	reliable
steadfast and stable bright blue pilot light.	bright blue pilot light.



## *Chrysalis Diary*

---

Cold told me  
to fasten my feet  
to this branch,  
  
to shed my skin,  
  
and I have obeyed.

November 13:

to dangle upside down  
from my perch,  
  
to cease being a caterpillar  
and I have obeyed.

(39)



(40)



December 6:

the color of leaves and life,  
has vanished!

lies in ruins!  
I study the  
brown new world around me.

I hear few sounds.

Swinging back and forth  
in the wind,  
I feel immeasurably alone.

I can make out snow falling.

I find I never tire of  
watching the flakes  
in their multitudes  
passing my window.

Green,

has vanished!  
The empire of leaves  
lies in ruins!

I fear the future.

Have any others of my kind  
survived this cataclysm?

January 4:

For five days and nights  
it's been drifting down.

Astounding.  
I enter these  
wondrous events  
in my chronicle

February 12:

Unable to see out  
at all this morning.

and branches falling.

ponder their import,

and wait for more.

The world is now white.  
Astounding.

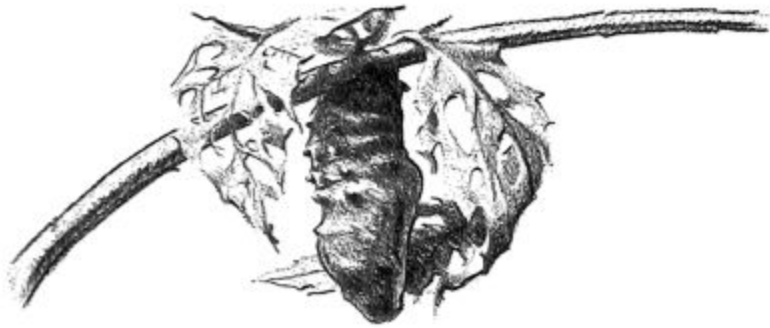
knowing no reader  
would believe me.

An ice storm last night.

Yet I hear boughs cracking

Hungry for sounds  
in this silent world,  
I cherish these,

miser them away  
in my memory,  
and wait for more.



March 28:

I wonder whether  
I am the same being  
who started this diary.

like the weather without.

my legs are dissolving,

my body's not mine.

This morning,  
a breeze from the south,  
strangely fragrant,

a faint glimpse of green  
in the branches.

(43)

And now I recall  
that last night  
I dreamt of flying.



I've felt stormy inside

My mouth is reshaping,

wings are growing  
my body's not mine.

a red-winged blackbird's  
call in the distance,

(44)