Songs of Seeing

Fusion Surimono

by

Marnie Reed Crowell

Surimono – Japanese for "printed thing". The Chinese have long decorated their scroll paintings with poems written in handsome calligraphy. By the early 1800's Japanese poets and poetry clubs were commissioning designs from the finest graphic artists such as Hokusai and Hiroshige. Master print makers of the day then made lavish broadsheets of these combined verbal and visual images.

Small editions of these prints were given to friends and associates as gifts at the New Year. All the most exquisite techniques of the day were used, with no need to justify publishing expense. Very soon after Japan was forcibly "opened" to the West in 1863, western printing techniques – etchings, lithographs, and engravings— largely replaced the making of surimono.

Today Marnie has combined techniques of painting and photography - pigments or pixels - with her poems to make what she calls "fusion surimono" although her printed things are often enjoyed on digital screens.

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Hold out my apron
catching bolts
from the sun
words plummeting
like hailstones
day and night
harvesting dreams
those half-sisters
of ripe poems
that Muses send.

Dragonfly, you land
atop my writing hand

tiny cinnamon stick
with gossamer wings.

In your intimate touch
an I-Thou experience

no longer than the
moment between breaths

I cannot hold you
only the back of my hand

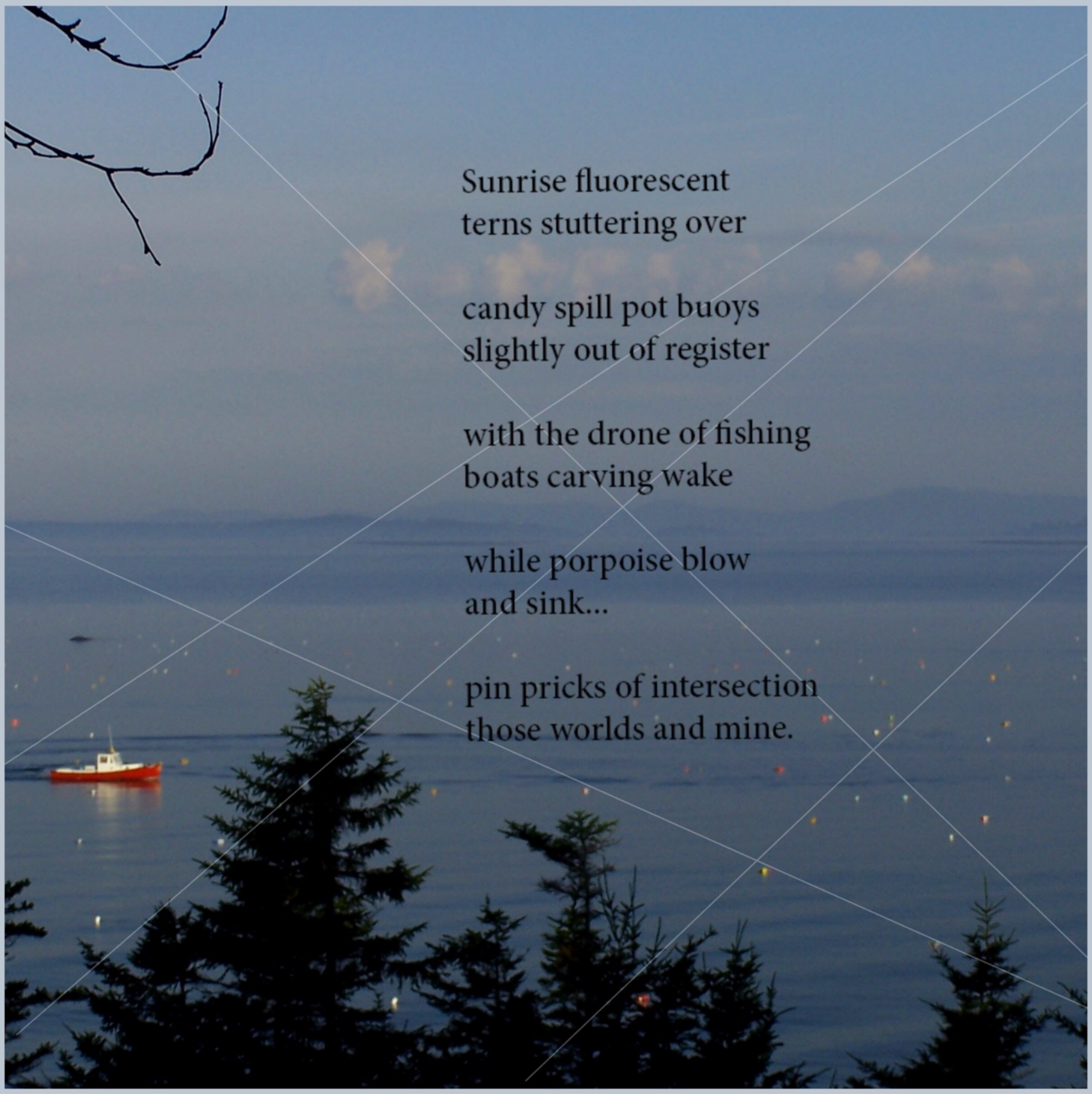
remembers what we might
have been trying to say.

Wearing sun on his head
moonlight on his shoulders
bobolink so fills the morning air
with May meadow dandelion gleam
that long after he's gone
the shimmer and pulse
imprint on the air.

A Blue Jay youngster
must have dropped it,
the small feather.

Even in the shade
faster than fading
its color vanishes

that momentary dark
a small lesson
in being blue.

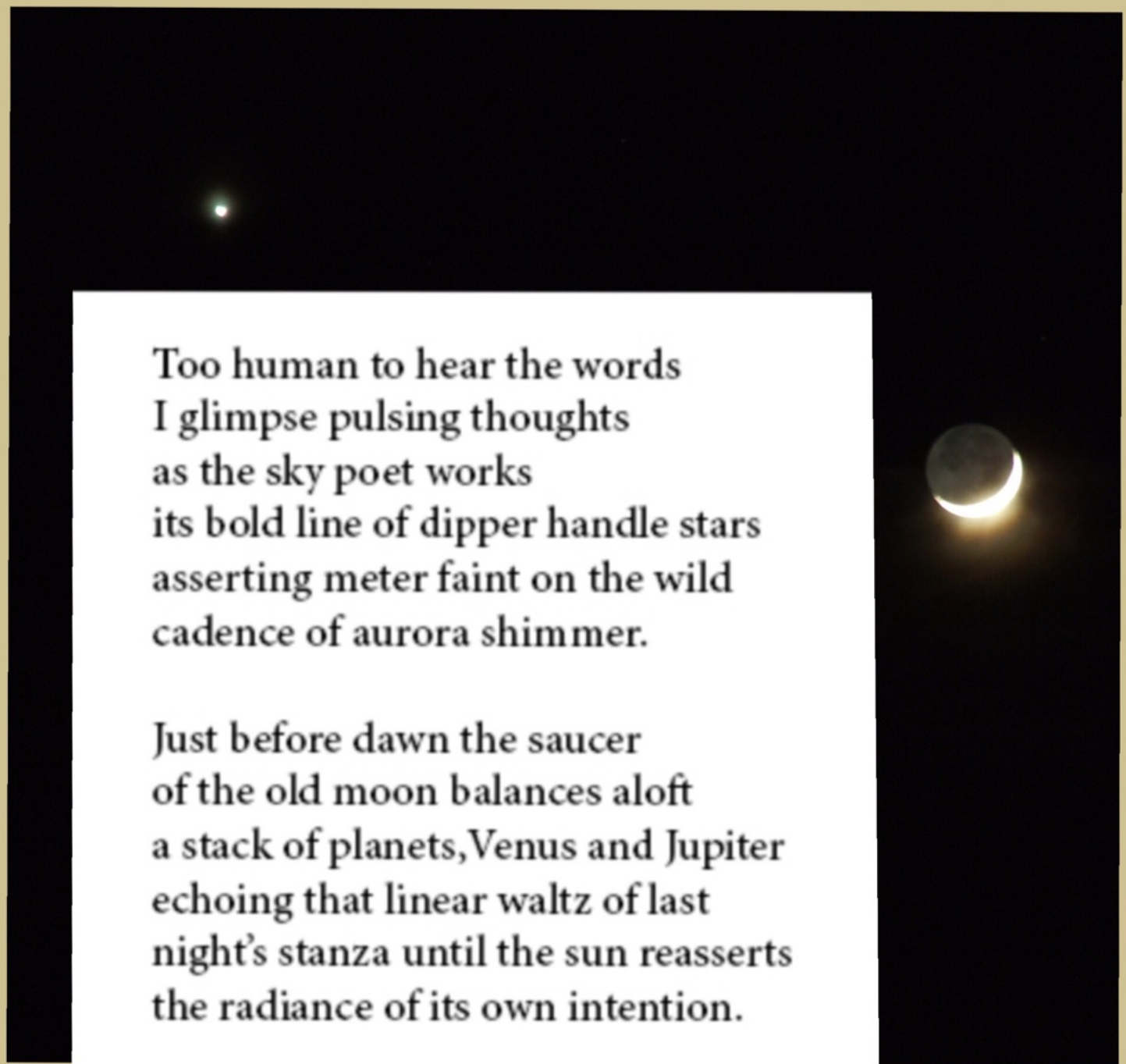

Sunrise fluorescent
terns stuttering over

candy spill pot buoys
slightly out of register

with the drone of fishing
boats carving wake

while porpoise blow
and sink...

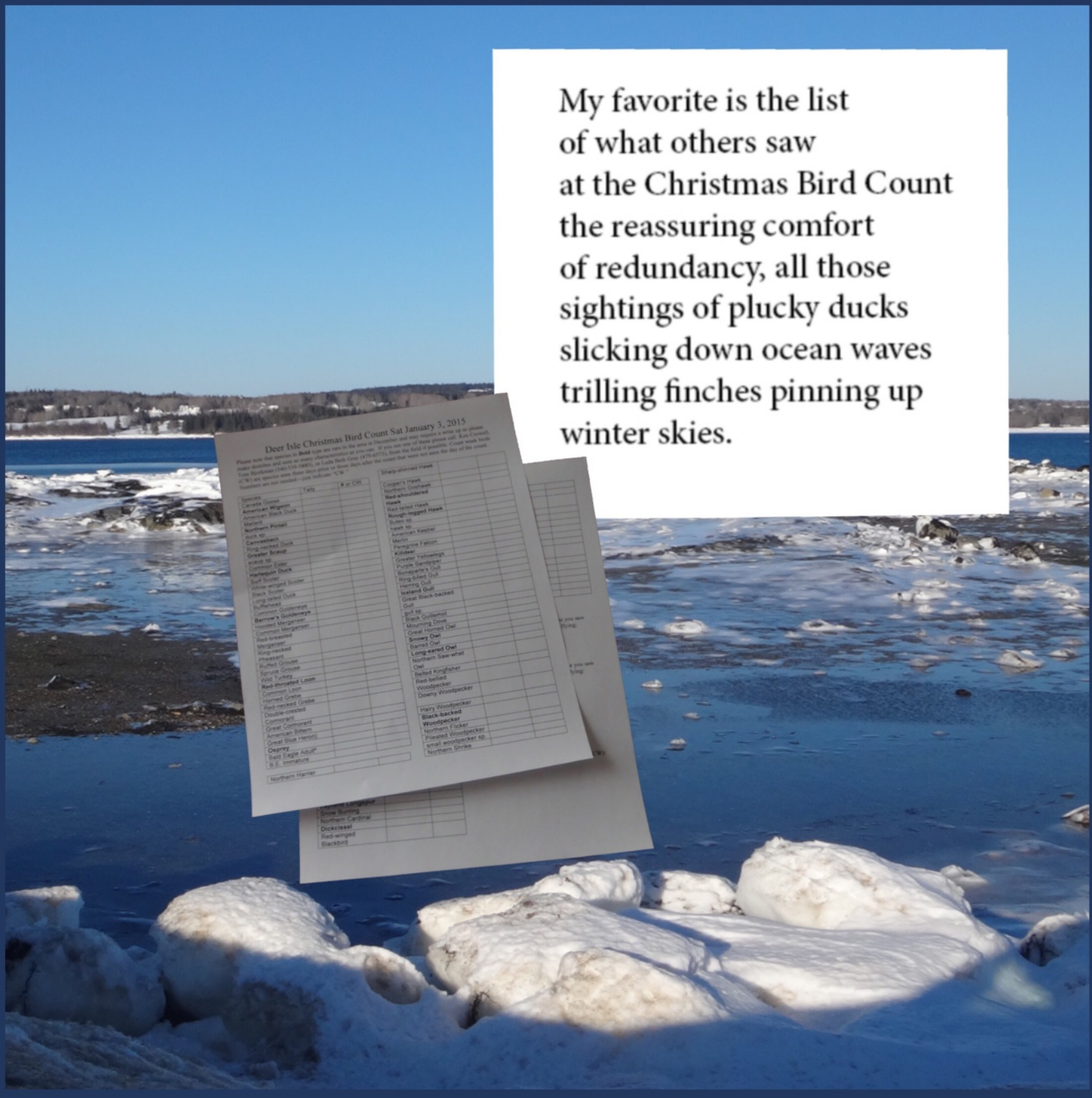
pin pricks of intersection
those worlds and mine.

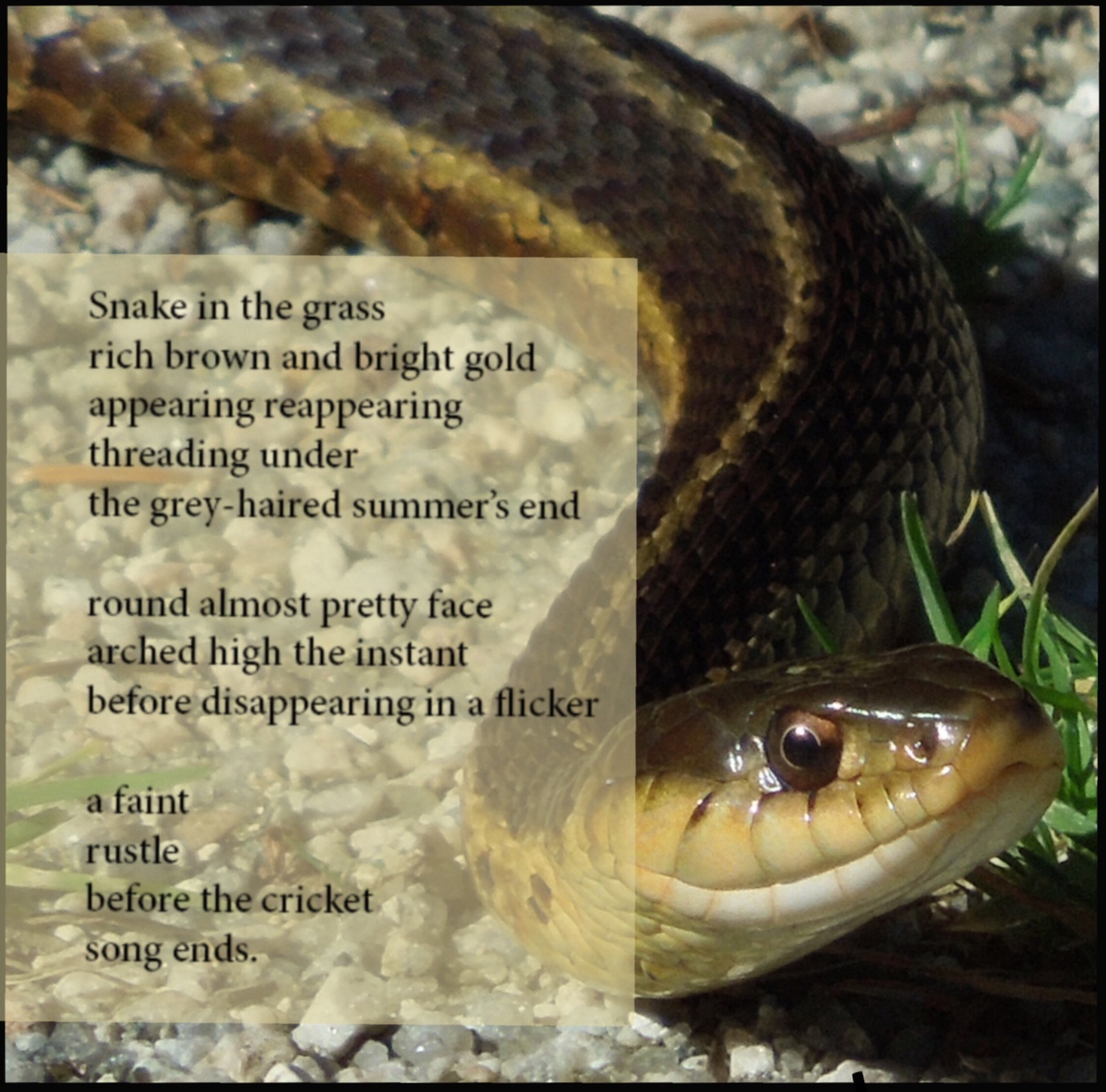


Too human to hear the words
I glimpse pulsing thoughts
as the sky poet works
its bold line of dipper handle stars
asserting meter faint on the wild
cadence of aurora shimmer.

Just before dawn the saucer
of the old moon balances aloft
a stack of planets,Venus and Jupiter
echoing that linear waltz of last
night's stanza until the sun reasserts
the radiance of its own intention.

Which reality
immortality
round and round
and out the door
shell or painting
evermore?


My favorite is the list
of what others saw
at the Christmas Bird Count
the reassuring comfort
of redundancy, all those
sightings of plucky ducks
slicking down ocean waves
trilling finches pinning up
winter skies.
Deer Isle Christmas Bird Count Sat January 3, 2015
Species
Tally
or DW
Canada Goose
American Wigeon
American Black Duck
Mallard
Northern Pintail
Duck sp
Canvasback
Ring-necked Duck
Greater Scaup
Eider sp
Common Eider
Harlequin Duck
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Black Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Barrow's Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ring-necked Pheasant
Ruffed Grouse
Spruce Grouse
Wild Turkey
Red-throated Loon
Common Loon
Horned Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Cormorant
American Bittern
Great Blue Heron
Osprey
Bald Eagle Adult*
B.E. Immature
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Northern Goshawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk
Buteo sp
hawk sp
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Killdeer
Greater Yellowlegs
Purple Sandpiper
Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Iceland Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
gull sp
Black Guillemot
Mourning Dove
Great Horned Owl
Snowy Owl
Barred Owl
Long-eared Owl
Northern Saw-whet Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Black-backed Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
small woodpecker sp
Northern Shrike
Snow Bunting
Northern Cardinal
Dickcissel
Red-winged Blackbird



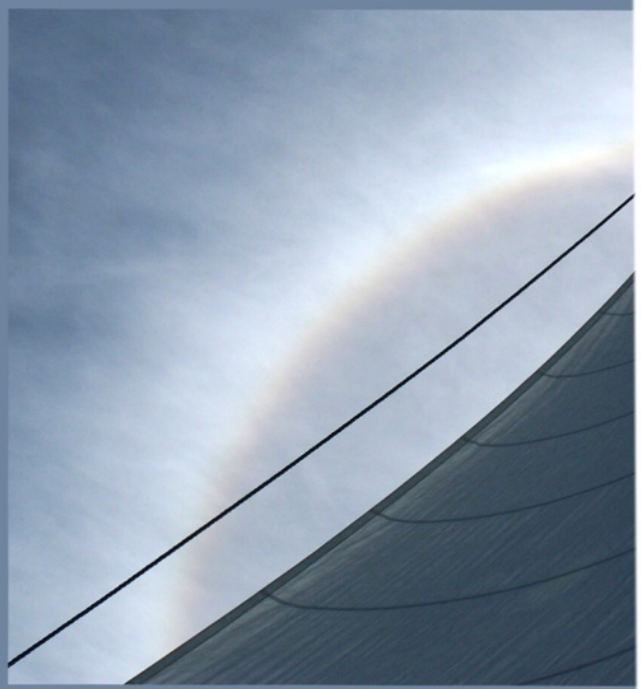
Snake in the grass
rich brown and bright gold
appearing reappearing
threading under
the grey-haired summer's end

round almost pretty face
arched high the instant
before disappearing in a flicker

a faint
rustle
before the cricket
song ends.

Wind writes
small poems
on grass

They call it going overboard
when snow flakes fall arrow straight to earth
so lobster boats which wintered under blue wraps
in the snug tide zone of defiant Christmas lights
now turtle ponderously back to sea
down potholed roads laned with dripping birches
in celebration of the coming season.



From my roof I can look above
the rampart spruce tops
and eavesdrop on eiders
who think they can come
chuckling in under my radar
by hugging the shore.

Angled to the ice-ringed sun
like some Arctic lizard,
my ears track foot taps up the slant.
I merely raise and eyelid
but even that's too much

for the red squirrel who has sidled up
to peek beneath my hat brim.
He leaps in terror or surprise
to the nearest tree reclaiming
just enough aplomb to scold.

Once in my meadow a weary bird
migrating under an autumn moon
mistook me for a boulder.
Rolling over to see who's there,
I felt its frantic fear claw
back up to the stars.

Eye to eye and still
we do not recognize
our selves in one another
nor look direct
without the veil.

Sandpipers print words
at the edge of the waves
helping to remind us
to write thank you notes

listening as waves whisper words
that human ears don't always hear
from planet riders who cannot speak
our language or we do not hear.

In the fog a small girl
in a spark-bright swimsuit
abandons her brother
digging clams far out on the flats

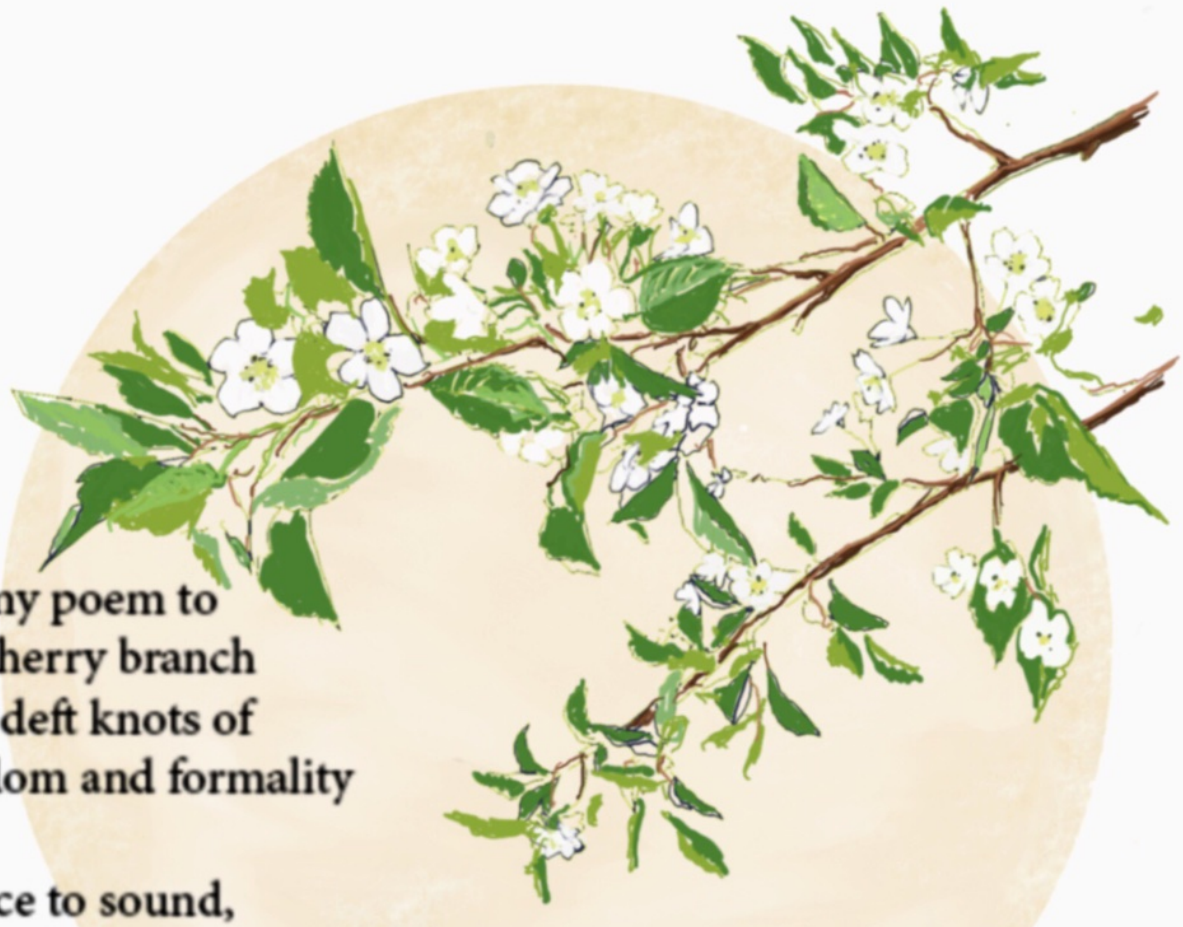
spirals
her way back
and forth
across the mud
her steps trying out rhythms

pausing
at every measure as
she looks back over her shoulder
at the tracks.

Ice now shutters bog eyes which since noon
have been staring at the sun.
In the shadowing dark of a January dusk
no path promises to lead me home.
Antlered birches step aside, hooves barely
clicking in the quiet. The white rock unfolds
hind legs to move off when I glance away.
On silent owl wings the winter bat sky flies.
Shape-shifters all, shamans on the journey
risking night on behalf of others
because we do not look.

Scared, yes, and stalked,
but never have I known
what the finch knows
as it hurls itself through
the sunny space above me
in less time
than it takes me
to think the words
evasive maneuver,
hawk in hungry pursuit
right up to the dark
spruce tangle shelter
where the finch perhaps
takes slowing breaths.
You can't tell me
that only humans
know the meaning of death,
not on an August afternoon.

Tarnish clouds now veil
the noon spring air
in February breath
before the long climb
up March hill.

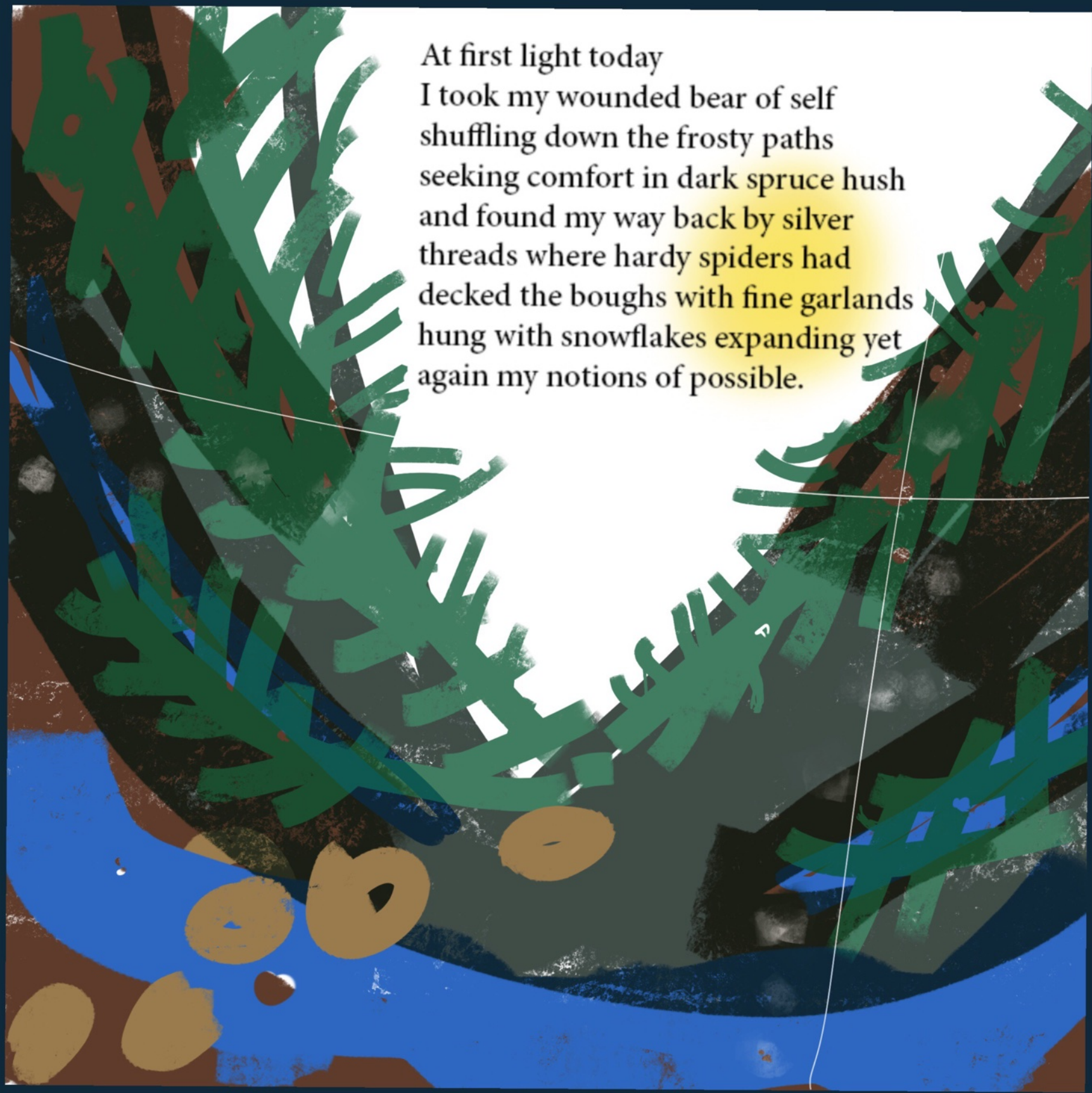


Tie my poem to
the cherry branch
with deft knots of
freedom and formality

silence to sound,
vase to flower,
page to ink

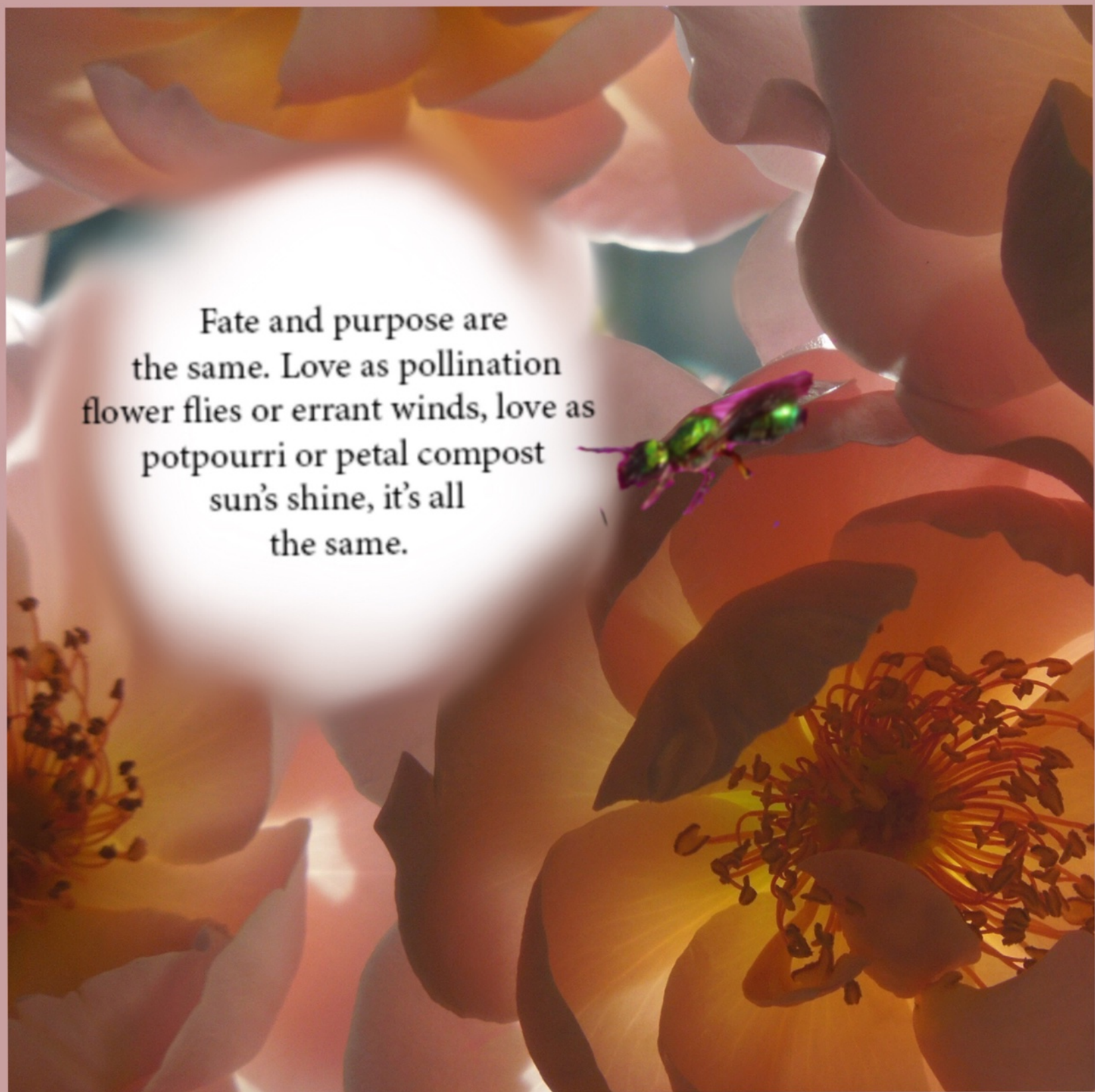
I sing the breathing words
of heaven, earth, and man
in bud and bloom
and fallen petal.

Come with me for a
very quiet walk
hoping we will startle
some image
into singing its song
in words.


At first light today
I took my wounded bear of self
shuffling down the frosty paths
seeking comfort in dark spruce hush
and found my way back by silver
threads where hardy spiders had
decked the boughs with fine garlands
hung with snowflakes expanding yet
again my notions of possible.

September brings out the first
Little Copper of this year
yin and yang of butterfly
forewings bright as flame
hind wings dark, edged with
old-fashioned rickrack red.

Win or lose at money, health, or love
and even peace and politics
instead of all the waiting work
watching butterflies in the sun
is storing optimism for zigzagging
through what's yet to come.


Fate and purpose are
the same. Love as pollination
flower flies or errant winds, love as
potpourri or petal compost
sun's shine, it's all
the same.

watching
dry leaves blow
see how they
box the compass
- the old fisherman

To hear the clouds
join birds at dawn
feel rain drops
falling from spruce
into the space
between thoughts.

Writing the word HEXAGON
I hear in its midst the tiny clicking
sounds of snow crystals landing
on my cap, on my shoulder, on my arm.

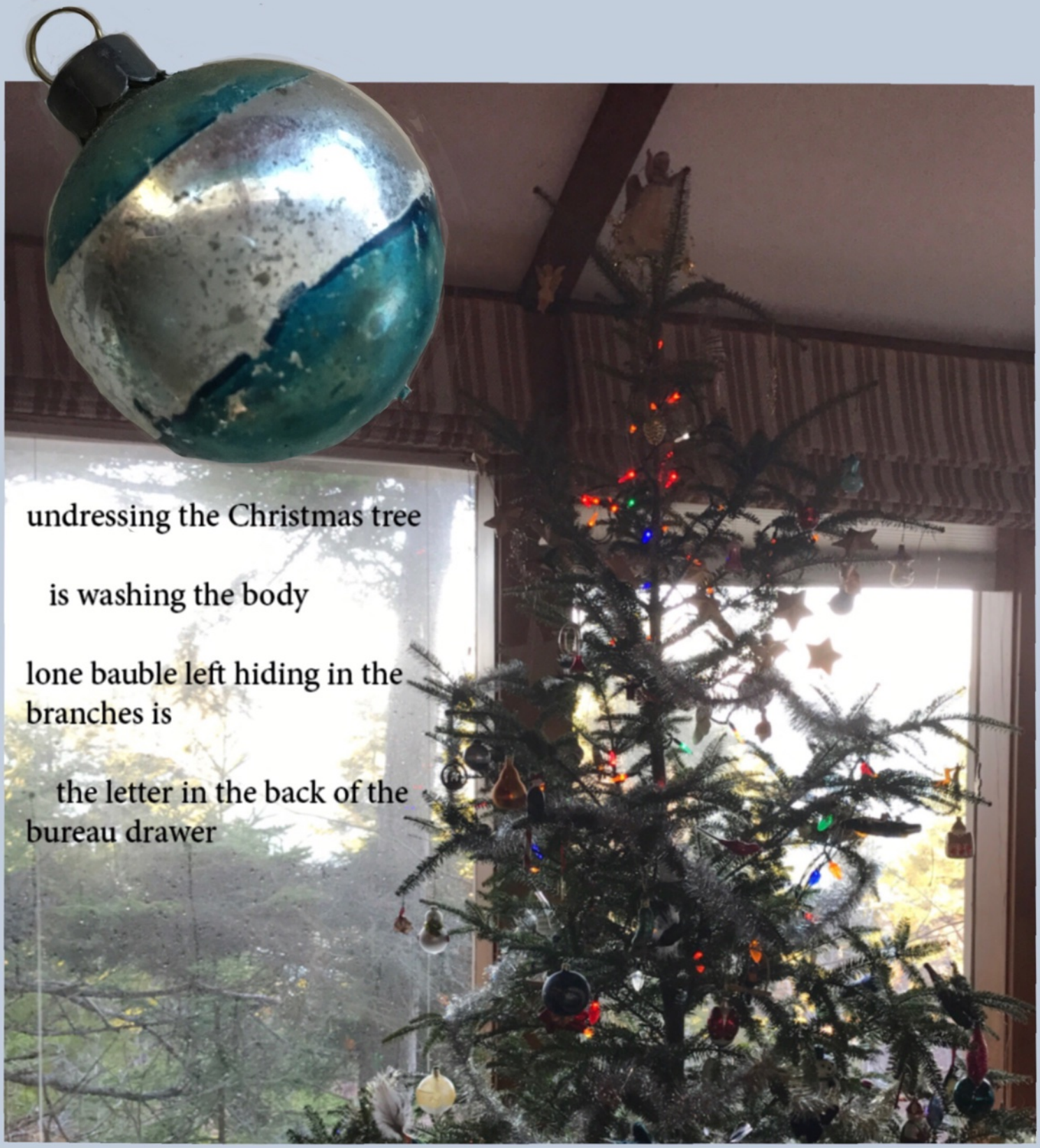
While trees held their breath
crows in the distance laughed
exulting that some of us
pay due attention.

Enso:
old cat asleep in sun
curled there in earned
contentment softly
breathing dreams.

Bare silver
driftwood
wind-pruned spruce
beauty not pain
what we recall.

I think I'd like to drive the snowplow
all that skillful rumbling rattle
riding my sparkling wave
surfing through the bright blue days
or lonely black and moaning nights
sweeping yellow lights hot butter
knifing through the shapely drifts

Act of God!
People would be glad
I'd gone down through.



undressing the Christmas tree

is washing the body

lone bauble left hiding in the branches is

the letter in the back of the bureau drawer

About the Author

Some people with whom this small work has been shared might feel more comfortable about liking it if it comes with assurance of approval. Marnie Reed Crowell has written for Public Television and Public Radio and her books were published by Funk & Wagnalls, Stackpole Books, and Times Books, in addition to works by Threehalf Press and magazine articles in such publications as Redbook, Readers' Digest, Audubon and Natural History. But more to the point, her poems, included in *Take Heart*, an anthology of Maine Poets, have also been commissioned for the dedication of an island church and the Penobscot Narrows bridge. One gallery viewer requested a surimono print for her grandson's room and another print was part of a ceremony of Remembrance. Individual surimono obtained from her Google Share portfolio sent daily provide healing cheer to those suffering from long-term challenges such as grieving or cancer treatments. Since Marnie thinks that sharing is more fun—satisfying—than sales and marketing, these are the sort of credentials which matter to her.