First Microscope

Fixed on fly wing compound eye. Your passport to the Infinite stamped at five: Indra's net of veins, of manifold mirrors. And on another slide – God's fish hook: fly leg, crook and barbs.

Hiraeth

It's not that first dwelling place – the walkup in your grandparents' brick house in a Brooklyn neighborhood half Hasidic Jewish, half Italian.

It's not the painted concrete stoop or the backyard fence with grapevines. These things you remember but don't want again. The images are blurred

like the street from the kitchen window steamed by your mother's cooking. The hurricane door in the backyard that grey wedge of mystery you knew

was portal to the Underworld of the cellar, with its must of wine casks. That comes closer. Once in a while those steel doors

yawned, propped open, scared but beckoned you. Maybe now it's that you long for –

that way you felt invited by the dark.

Fairy Shrimp

Let's turn this morning from the roadside's grit and rotten snow and pad over leaf mats under the dripping trees. This latest of many thaws has stranded snowmelt in low spots under hummocks Where root balls the size of bears tore free of earth, dark rain pools teem with multitudes, with strange pale forms from under. In my first year of teaching I led my seventh graders to the woods to study vernal pools. Study? No - to stare astonished at what we found: plump transparent one inch freshwater shrimp sidestroked across a black pool, chalk streaks on a slate board. I scooped some tea-brown water in my hand: the pink knots of their hearts winked through their crystal cases. It felt almost sacramental as if we had been invited to the marriage of earth and ether where the sun first kissed the water, waking it to life. Later that spring there were milky gelatinous masses of salamander eggs to pluck from those pools. We watched them hatch in white enameled trays in the classroom,

things to know, to name, but none like those first unfathomables: secrets entrusted to us who were somehow – dumbstruck as we were – exactly the witnesses needed.

Nature Writing Class

The students forage for signs. House sparrows flit among strawberry bushes just a few scarlet fruits

still hanging. A woodchuck startles whistles trundles fat rolls rears a moment watches as we watch.

The girl who never speaks dallies with a salamander browser in brown leaves.

Ha ha – a woodpecker's tapping a concrete post!

Someone holds up a spruce cone stripped of scales by squirrels. Sow, seek, eat, and scatter – when will this rummage cease and what will come of it?

Cedar Creek. We humans, on a bridge between two hungers: A kingfisher flings his rattle-cry, fish rise to damselflies, to trouble our reflections.

Scenes from my Daughter's Childhood

I. TO MY DAUGHTER THE CLIMBER OF TREES

At four your refuge was the one ancient apple tree you played in that had just the twist of trunk to hold your dreams. It was the only world you needed. How I wanted to preserve that gnarled old tree for you, and you for it. But the neighbor's ire at your play (they were his woods after all) moved him to cut it down. You wept, I offered comfort, but could not stop time from doing what it does to all of us. I write this after staring at a photo, "Anna 3," of a young woman perched in a sapling lithe as she is. Her back is arched, eves shuttered to remain outside of time within that frame.

II. TO MY DAUGHTER THE VETERINARIAN ON HER FORTIETH BIRTHDAY

I

Remember your fifth birthday party? Between the opening of the presents and the candled cake, one of our cats darted past you and your little group of friends, the limp brown body of a chipmunk in its mouth. I seized the cat and forced her to drop her prey. The chipmunk lay unmoving, drawing gasps from all six girls. From you, big tears. But I saw a whisker twitch, so I sent you in for peanut butter. I dipped a twig and dabbed the chipmunk's nose, and PRESTO! her eyes opened. One quick leap and gone, under rhododendrons. All six girls laughed and hugged and we had the cake.

Π

Weeks later, we drove by a road-killed fat raccoon. Recent, by the look of him, still glossy, silver and black fur bristling. Stop the car daddy! Stop! Get peanut butter!

III. MY DAUGHTER'S SURGERIES

At five you'd plumb the cat-killed chipmunk with a pair of sharp sticks,

open its limp body, pluck out tiny organs till you found the bright red berry of the heart.

"To see how it looks inside," you'd say. And now, your still-small fingers

pull back shuddering skin and muscle panels, reach deep into the rooms of horses' sides

like throwing open shutters after a storm. Your own heart's strong enough

to beat for two, a thousand pounds of beast suspended in your sling and all your hundred

fire and fiber and nerve, as counterweight.