

Praise for *The Place We Become*



Carolyn Locke's poems are infused with place, from the familiar—Deer Isle, St. Sauveur Mountain, Route 220—to the exotic—Morocco, China, and Myanmar. I am drawn to the wonderful poems about China. In “At Lingyin Temple” the speaker is calmed by one of the arhats, and in a Chinese park, “Women in white hold scarlet fans to their breasts.” Back in Maine, the territory is familiar, but the encounters with the natural world are startling and vivid: the speaker stares into a raccoon's eyes, “separate hearts beating / wild on either side of the glass” and in “An Owl In February” feels “the shiver of a mouse” as it skitters away from an owl on the hunt. Carolyn Locke has a piercing eye for the telling detail.

—TOM MOORE, author of *The Bolt-Cutters* and *Chet Sawing*

Carolyn Locke's new collection, *The Place We Become*, shows her deepening attentiveness to the currents of the natural world and the tentative attachment of humans to their own seasonal rhythms. These poems, with their rich interweaving of the concrete and abstract, remind us of “the insistent rocking of life on its hinges.”

—KATHLEEN ELLIS, author of *Vanishing Act*
and *Entering Earthquake Country*

Also by Carolyn Locke



Always This Falling

*Not One Thing: Following Matsuo Basho's Narrow
Road to the Interior*

The
Place
We
Become



poems by
Carolyn Locke

The Place We Become
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Inevitable

Moonrise and the running of mackerel—
this an endless story into which I've fallen.
I'm not anyone I know anymore.

I rest on water, a bell buoy
quiet in mirrored stillness, tipped
by waves as they swell—an echo
tracking the distance to shore.

A child sings herself to sleep
beneath an open window.
A door slams, and out on the bay
the cormorant holds fast
to her rock in the rising tide.

I'm not anyone I know anymore.
A firefly caught in a jar, I buzz and bump
against the glass, sparkling light
blinking on and off in darkness.

This is a story I cannot rehearse.
Lifting the belly of this imperfect bowl,
I drink what lies within.

On Speaking

There are days when all that can be said
is that people are separate,

like light
that has passed through a prism,

and so, unable to speak, to break
through the invisible shield between them,

they watch the solitary play of colors
dancing in silence

until they find themselves
drawn by the force of indigo

pulling them deep
where words tick slow and even,

notes steadied
by the metronome of the heart.

Pickering Cove, Deer Isle

This is the place we become:
rock slabs in the mouth
of the cove, their heaviness

drawing the sea to them.
Like blood in a mother's veins,
it transforms the life

within us. Yielding
we fall into darkness,
a shower of meteors

out on the restless bay
where so many islands
are only one island exploded.

In the Parks of China

Each morning, one by one
or in sociable flocks, people arrive,
mysterious as birds navigating the sky.

Women in white hold scarlet fans to their breasts,
then spread their arms wide. *Fwip! Fwap!*—
fans open like wings, and they begin to dance.

An old man, head down like a sandpiper on the shore,
passes his brush over the sidewalk, his fine watery strokes
releasing the characters blooming in his mind.

On a nearby bench, a musician perches, erhu in his lap.
Slowly he draws bow across string, his melody
drifting among pink lotus in the ponds.

Company workers, a hundredfold or more
in identical blue T-shirts, jog behind standard bearers
lifting bright blue and yellow flags.

A man stands at the water's edge yelling
Hai! Hai! Hai! forceful
as a crow calling from the treetops.

A gaggle of singers tunes up beneath an archway
and a crowd swells around them, joining in—
a triumphant chorus echoing off the old stonework.

In a wide open space, men and women glide
along harmonious currents of energy—hands
pushing out, pulling in; bodies turning, balancing.

A few renegades, solitary as herons, stand apart.
They lift each leg slowly, raise arms to the sky,
and let them fall, coming to rest in silence.

Grace Among Strangers

A man on a Shanghai sidewalk
listens in on my American companion
speaking Chinese to the lotus seed seller,
takes a step closer and looks
from one to the other and back again.
He delights in the volley, a wide grin
splitting his face, his eyes sparkling.

In Jing'an Park, three old men
on their morning walk stop to watch
as I wobble on one leg, lift high
the other, struggle to move arms
in the slow patterns of the Tai Chi master.
Huddled together, they chatter, smile
in wonder, and nod approval.

Like curious monkeys, the little boys
of Huangcun scramble up the outside wall
and peer in at us through the open window.
As we turn and wave, they lower their heads
beneath the sill, uncontrollable giggles
floating up, a flurry of bubbles
bright and airy in the morning sun.

The housekeeper of Xhong Xian Di flutters
in midnight blue and sparkling sequins,
then settles on a seat beside me. Grinning,
she points to a family photo on the table.
I smile and nod. She pats my knee, takes off
into a maze of rooms, then quickly returns
and perches, puffing out her chest as if
she's about to break into song.

Upon Being Asked: Who Am I?

I am a cloud nudging the mountaintop,
snowfield under a full moon, ice on a dark pond.

I am seeping meltwater, a seed in frozen ground,
breath of spring waiting, orchid memories.

I am the crow that circles the field, echoing
hoot of the owl, sap dripping in a metal bucket.

I am the rush of light before darkness, leaf shadow,
the moment beyond breath's exhalation.

At Jasper Beach

Somewhere in this quiet night
fish are drifting with the currents
and black volcanic stones
gleam along the water's edge.

And here behind the dunes
where marsh and forest meet
is where the sweetgrass grows,
where once we stood, are standing still.

It was summer then, and pulling
strand after strand, fingers pressed
against the flesh, we gathered in the way
gathering has always been done.

And somewhere in this quiet night,
beneath ancient constellations,
ghosts of what we left behind
rustle in the autumn wind, hold firm.

And stars in distant galaxies are being born,
exploding into death, their prolonged
ecstatic light pulsing
toward this fickle seam of land and ocean's edge.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

photograph by Najean Shedyak



CAROLYN LOCKE is the author of *Always This Falling*, a collection of poems, and *Not One Thing: Following Matsuo Basho's Narrow Road to the Interior*, a haibun which combines haiku, prose, and original photographs in a meditative journal about her travels in Japan. A graduate of Bates College with a Bachelor of Arts in English and of Goddard College with a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, she has taught for many years at the secondary level. Her poems have appeared in numerous publications, including *Take Heart*, a collection of Maine verse selected by Maine Poet Laureate Wes McNair, and have twice been cited in Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance competitions. She lives in Troy, Maine.

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