

NOTICING

365 DAYS OF CALM REFLECTIONS

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Noticing: 365 Days of Calm Reflections

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INTRODUCTION

If you ever visit Cheekwood Botanical Gardens in Nashville, Tennessee, take a tour through the mansion. I used to be a docent there, and if you were on one of my tours, I would point out elements of the mansion worth noticing. One would be the view through the south windows. I would encourage you to notice a long, rectangular pool attended by two gray stone Greek goddesses: Thalia, muse of comedy, at one end and Urania, muse of astronomy, at the other. This is the “reflecting pool.” When I first learned its name, I thought it came from the reflections in the water—sky, clouds, trees, statues, and you, if you’re looking into it. But its name actually refers to the practice of reflecting. As in thinking. Considering. Pondering. *Musing*. That’s why there are benches by the pool and probably why the statues of the *muses* stand there looking so thoughtful.

I’ve been reflecting on *reflection*. The word is related to *flex* and *flexible* and originated with the Latin word *reflectere*, which means “to bend back.” Energy (like light, heat, and sound) bends back after hitting a surface and returns to us in what we experience as a *reflection*. In the sense of musing, reflection is our thoughts bending back to us. Noticing, then reflecting on what we notice can lead to reverence, awe, wonder, and gratitude. It can be a

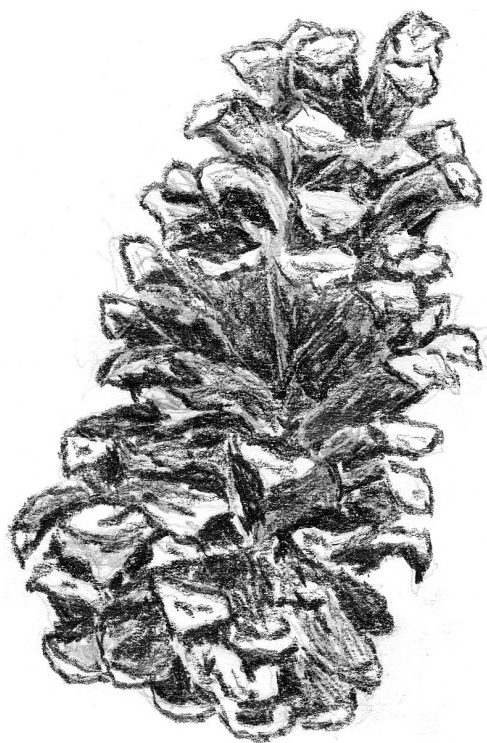
type of meditation, a kind of prayer, a sacred, holy practice. As such, it's wondrously important, because as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so we reflect to the world whatever we reflect on. My wish for you, as you join me in this year of readings, is that you will be gently drawn to notice and reflect on all that's beautiful, peaceful, wondrous, and hopeful and reflect that back into the world. Our world needs you.

Two notes:

First, since I live in the northern hemisphere, I've begun this book with winter. If you live in the southern hemisphere, you may want to start with the summer months.

Second, it may take you more than a year to get through these 365 readings. No pressure. You can skip some entries and even double back and start again. Use this book in whatever way suits you.

WINTER



JANUARY

1

A new day, a new month, a new year. In my neighborhood, it has dawned bright and breezy with clouds scudding across the sky. The sun peeks in from the east now and then to splash down tree trunks and redden bare branches. I open my windows to a chorus of birds reveling in this amazingly mild weather. But it's too mild, I know. Mountains of blue-gray clouds are approaching from the southwest. In a little over 24 hours, temperatures are expected to drop, and we may have snow showers. Between now and then? Storms. Strong wind. Hail maybe. Possible tornadoes. These transition times between balmy and cold are wild. Dangerous even. But, oh, while the mild breeze blows through the windows, I have hopeful thoughts of spring.

2

It's mid-afternoon. Storms have blown through, and the sky is a soft gray. Raindrops drip from gutters and tap at windowpanes. The elm outside, which was thrashing about in the wind just an hour ago, is now steady and still, and a flock of birds—I can't see what kind—is perched in its upper branches. I count them.

Twenty, twenty-five, maybe thirty. As I'm counting, one darts away, one hops to a different branch. They are overseers of this rain-soaked yard, carolers on this chill day.

3

Two of my favorite things are windows and treetops. As I took my seat in the choir loft at church this morning, I looked across the balcony to see both. The tip-top branches of a tree were framed in one of the high windows against the backdrop of gray-blue clouds. The branches rocked back and forth in the wind like a painting that had come alive. Maybe it was dancing to our songs.

4

I've been brushing up on my drawing skills by reading a book I've had since college when I took art classes: *The Natural Way to Draw* by Kimon Nicolaides. He points out that even objects we think of as motionless have movement. So now I'm noticing the movement of all kinds of objects around me. The squat teapot, round and solid with its handle that arches up and over from its backside to descend to its spout, which flows up and out to offer itself. The two matching teacups, each circling up from their bases

wider and wider to their rims. A vase that sits heavily on my counter, rounding at its belly then flaring up and out to hold carnations with wavy petals and a spider mum wildly splaying its petals this way and that. All of these are motionless, but even in their stillness, they hold movement.

5

The weather watchers I follow for up-to-the-minute forecasts are saying that in the falling temperatures today, the rain will change to sleet that will, in turn, become snow. It's a soup day. A hot chocolate day. A warm sweater, cat-in-the-lap day.

6

The snow dances
in a whirling frenzy,
 swirling,
 sweeping,
 sliding.
Then the wind subsides,
and the flakes settle
 to a slow drift
until the next gust
whips it up again,

and in a whirling frenzy,
the snow dances.

– kh –

7

Snow perches in dollops on branches and sits piled in thick mounds on the deck rail and stairs. Bits of grass peek through the lawn's white blanket, and the tips of daffodil leaves have emerged. My five-year-old grandson is playing in our snowed-in treehouse. He sails down the slide in a flurry of snow and calls, "Is this an excitement day?" "Yes," I call back. "It's an excitement day." And truly, it is.

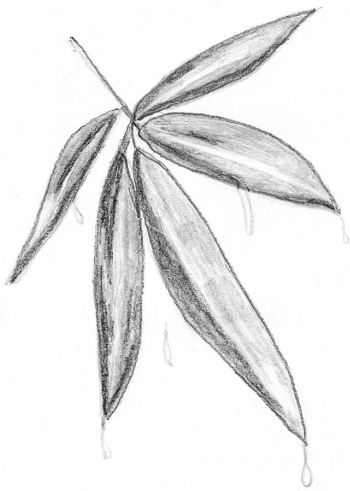
8

I'm watching a lampshade gently sway in the updraft of warm air from a heating duct on the floor. Across the room, shamrocks bob in rising air from a matching duct below their flower pot. They are visual echoes of each other, quietly bobbing and swaying to the flow of warm air as if the shamrocks are acknowledging the movement of the lampshade, and the lampshade is respectfully nodding back. It's a subtle dance, and I wonder why I'm drawn to it. I wonder why I note it in my journal. Maybe it's the

large eyes surveying my backyard world, and the icicles look like bangs. This morning, my house is wearing icy bangs.

14

Heavy rain is pounding us today, streaking the windowpanes south and west, beating a constant tap-pat on the roof. The bamboo is bowed and dripping. Pine branches bob in the rush of water. Drops pummel the deck, spraying out in tiny explosions. I imagine trying to type as fast as this rain pelts down. I'm fast, but I'm no match for this frantic unseen typist, a ghost writer, racing to get stormy thoughts down before the clouds move on.



SPRING



APRIL

1

From my kitchen window this morning,
I spied you dancing with your partner,
your wings a blur of gray and white.
 You faced each other,
 fluttering up a foot or so
 then fluttering down to the ground.
 After a brief rest,
feathers whipped out once more,
you took a short whirl together.
Now you perch on a fence post,
 white breasts, soft gray backs,
 gray wings striped with white.
You both rise again in a flirty, fluttery swirl of wings.
A pudgy squirrel scampers out of your way
as you once again drift to the ground,
 but you pay him no attention
as you continue your spring fling.

Later, I see you watching me through my window.
 Asking me to dance?
Why, yes, thank you, I believe I will.
 And if I could,
 I would fly.