

BRIDGE OF FLOWERS: SHELBURNE FALLS, MA

I thought it would be *made*
of flowers. That is, after all,
what the name implies:
blossoming arch with vines
for girders, overwhelming smell
of jasmine. But there's just
this puny footbridge with plots

of dirt on either side
of the walkway, a few
scattered spates of tulips,
wire fence running its length—
the kind that borders
the playground in the projects.
Lately, everything disappoints me.

I'm still a tourist, just moved
a few months back,
so I believe the promises
postcards make, their colors
impossibly lush. I respect
the effort, the local women's club
on their knees and planting bulbs,

but why not call things what they are?
At best, this is the Bridge *with*
Flowers, and most of them dying.
I should have known when I saw
the sign on Main, two opposing arrows,
one for each of Shelburne Falls'
attractions—"Bridge Parking"

in one direction, "Potholes" the other.
I take things too literally, I know;
the Sugar House on Mohawk Trail
doesn't glisten like a freshly licked
snow cone, nothing worthy of *Hansel*
and Gretel. We hike the mountain
to find trees tapped for sap,

but it's too cold to see any drip,
not one amber morsel. We savor
the bits of maple candy
they dispense while we wait
on wooden benches—
two hours for breakfast. And so
I study the brochure's printed story:

the 40 gallons of raw sap
boiled down for a single gallon
of finished syrup, and the tiny
one-month window when it's good.
New home, new life—is that
what I expected? That Paradise Pond
would be Eden for me? If it ever was,

it isn't now; the sign reads
"No Swimming Any Season,"
all that promise buried under a crust
of ice, just to thaw untouched.
And yet without the wait,
the desolate, snow-coated months
of winter, how meaningful is spring?

For the locals, stirring steamy
vats of sap, it's harvest time,
and breakfast finally ready. Still,
how do they live all year for this:
these soggy pancakes, this barren pond,
this bridge of wood and steel?