

## June



In June, spring blooms into summer with a splendid array of flowers around the neighborhood. Brisk winds waft the sweet scent of a mock orange bush down the block, and flowers blooming in our vegetable garden presage tasty treats later in the summer. Leaves that sprouted and grew through the spring reach summer fullness, and it becomes harder to see novelty in the solid green canopy. As inspiration begins to falter, I am relieved when late June's daylilies and hydrangeas

appear. They are showy and extravagant, as though to compete with the abundant greenness.

Warmer temperatures also unsettle the weather, and I revel in the meteorological spectacle provided by summer storms, which I have enjoyed experiencing since childhood. From brief cloudbursts that leave rainbows in their wake to momentous thunder and lightning, storms thrill with elemental power.

In a steamy, stormy week, the morning of June 14 was cloudy, but rain was not expected until later in the afternoon. A colleague and I decided, perhaps a bit foolishly, to walk toward downtown Minneapolis for lunch. As we ate, the skies darkened and we watched a steady downpour that showed no signs of letting up. On the way back to the office we laughed as we got soaked to the skin. Fortunately, I had a dry set of clothes from my bike ride in, and the office is casual enough that

wearing them for the afternoon didn't feel too awkward.

In between storms, my daughters enjoy the warmth and freedom of summer. It is easier for them to join me on walks when it doesn't involve zipping coats, fitting feet into boots, and tracking down both halves of a pair of mittens. They are generally more interested in animals than trees, and the child's eye view of the neighborhood turns to a focus on urban wildlife. On June 19 we crossed paths with a solid stream of tiny brown ants, apparently an entire colony picking up and moving en masse. Fascinated, my two-year-old asked to get out of her stroller for a closer look. When she prodded them with her finger, the collective action of hundreds of ants shifting away from the disturbance was like the flow of a river around a rock in midstream.

As the three of us returned home at the end of our walk on June 4, we paused on the back patio

to play the classic game of finding pictures in the clouds, spotting a rather cuddly-looking dragon breathing a great puff of smoke over our house.

The moment reminds me of another day of sunny skies decorated with kaleidoscopic clouds. More than twenty years ago now, that day found me lying on my back on my parents' deck with my best friend, my brother, and his best friend. We were sprawled in that lazy way of the morning after staying up way past our bedtimes, gazing up at the clouds and imagining hippopotami and spaceships floating by.

It was near the end of a joint summer sleepover that has become legendary, and the four of us continue to tell the stories from it whenever the opportunity arises. The first day was a series of adventures with paper bags. My parents usually had a sizable stockpile of paper grocery store bags stashed in the basement, useful for collecting cans for recycling and other thoroughly practical

purposes. We discovered that opening two bags and placing one upside-down inside the other created fairly sturdy, lightweight bricks. After building some towers with these bricks and knocking them down with all the delight of oversized toddlers, we progressed to constructing two-deep walls across the driveway and crashing through them on our bikes, imagining wild chase scenes from an action movie. As the afternoon grew hot, we moved into the coolness of my parents' basement. Still fascinated by the paper bags, we filled the stairwell with our bricks, leaving a tunnel just large enough to slither up and down the stairs. (In hindsight, probably something the fire marshal would have frowned upon.)

Blocking off the stairwell had the added effect of making the basement quite dark, even on a sunny summer afternoon. We crawled back up the stairs to gather blankets, clothespins, tape, and other materials to block off the few high windows.

When that project was done, we had created a darkness more complete than anything I have since experienced, aside from when the tour guide turned out the lights in the depths of Mammoth Cave. What better to do when you can't see a hand held two inches in front of your face than play hide-and-seek? With the visual aspect of seeking effectively removed from the game, the challenge became much more oriented to sound. As seeker, I strained to catch the faintest shuffle or breath. While hiding, effort concentrated on staying as still as possible and holding back giggles as I imagined the seeker fumbling around, arms stretched forward, and sensed their approach to where I sat with my back pressed against the wall. One of the later rounds stretched out seemingly interminably when someone discovered that the best place to hide was simply sitting in the middle of the room, out of the path of a seeker feeling their way around the walls and furniture.

Looking back, what makes those two days so memorable may be that they represent a last flash of true childhood. I was about fourteen at the time, in the midst of the awkward middle school years. Recess had disappeared from the school day. My brother and I no longer acted out adventure games like “Kentucky Jones” or Arctic explorers. Recreation had turned more to reading fantasy and historical fiction, chatting with friends, and keeping stats on the Minnesota Twins. But for those two days, the four of us returned to unfettered creativity, transforming simple found objects like paper grocery bags into versatile toys and imagining shapes in the clouds. The practice of watching for and crafting moments sometimes brings flashes of that simple, creative joy, as I find myself splashing through puddles, crouching on the sidewalk to investigate ants, or finding maps of fantasy lands in piles of pine needles.

June 1

A high wisp of cloud flares palest gold in the morning light, like the wing of an angel.

~ Horton Park

June 2

A brisk wind swirls the air, filling it with the sweet fragrance of the mock orange bush on the corner. I rejoice in the pleasure of the moment, though I know the same wind will soon hinder my bike ride.

~ Seminary Avenue

June 3

Insubstantial on their own, water, light, and air construct fantastic aerial architecture.

~ Horton Park



June 4

Both girls are with us for this morning's walk.  
Returning to our back door, they look at the shapes  
in the sky and see a puffy white dragon breathing a  
great plume of cloudy smoke, chasing us inside.

*~ My back yard*

June 5

Siberian irises stand straight and tall, like  
amethyst-crowned yogis in graceful mountain pose.

*~ Englewood Avenue*

June 6

A rainbow forms and fades in the brief moment  
between the sudden end of an afternoon cloud-  
burst and the return of clear, crystalline blue skies.

*~ Horton Park*

June 7

Trees inhabit tufty archipelagos spread over the otherwise freshly mown lawn.

~ Horton Park

June 8

Flowers, prized not so much for their beauty as for the tasty treats they promise, appear on our strawberries, tomatoes, and peas.

~ My back yard

June 9

A crow perches on a power line, surveying a brooding scene of drooping branches and scudding clouds in the aftermath of a storm.

~ Horton Park

June 10

Rainbows have fallen to earth around the block,  
painting gardens in vibrant and varied hues.

~ Seminary Avenue

June 11

Early morning stillness prevails well into day, as  
the sun rises above the treetops and steamy heat  
sets in.

~ Horton Park

June 12

Just as the solid green canopy has grown almost  
monotonous, catalpas and tree lilacs add clouds of  
white flowers to the view.

~ Friends School peace garden & Horton Park

June 13

The awesome power of the sun made audible thrills with the steady thrumming of a downpour and thunder's rolling, rumbling roar.

*- My bedroom*

June 14

Jumbo size raindrops crash into puddles, erupting in an ever-changing aquascape of splashy craters.

*- Outside Spoon River restaurant*

June 15

Torrents of overnight rain sculpted a relief map from fallen pine needles, rusty orange continents in dark earthy seas.

*- Horton Park*



June 16

A delicate, pinewood-colored shelf fungus climbs the branches of a lilac bush, as though a tiny elven carpenter has been busily building stairways.

*~ My neighbor's yard*

June 17

During a noontime softball game I am warmed from inside and out by exercise and the sun on my back, until my muscles feel like butter softened for cookie dough.

*~ U of M 2nd Street softball fields*

June 18

Driving through central Minnesota, farmland rolls by in smooth green swells.

*~ Interstate 94, southeast of Alexandria*

June 19

A river of tiny brown ants moving house flows  
down the sidewalk, spinning in eddies when  
disturbed by a curious finger.

~ Seminary Avenue

June 20

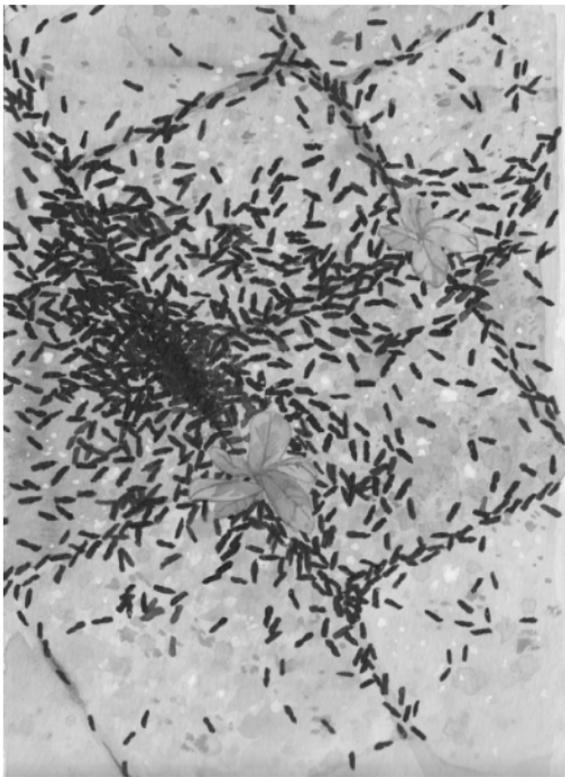
Morning sun stabs through a dense crown of  
maple leaves, bursting into a hundred blinding  
needles of golden light.

~ Horton Park

June 21

A murder of crows strutting on the grass and  
flapping their dark, heavy bodies up to tree  
branches strike an ominous note with their eerie,  
croaking cries.

~ Horton Park



June 22

Like a many-membered brass section, the flared flowers of flashy yellow lilies trumpet a greeting from our front hill.

*~ My front yard*

June 23

A curtain of clouds rests on the Minneapolis skyline, as though it has gotten stuck on its way down for intermission.

*~ Pierce Butler Route*

June 24

Mist gathers in a small hollow, as if from a cauldron bubbling with eye of newt and toe of frog.

*~ Horton Park*

June 25

Hydrangea flowers' large white globes adorn their bushes, like oversize popcorn balls in a holiday display.

~ Englewood Avenue

June 26

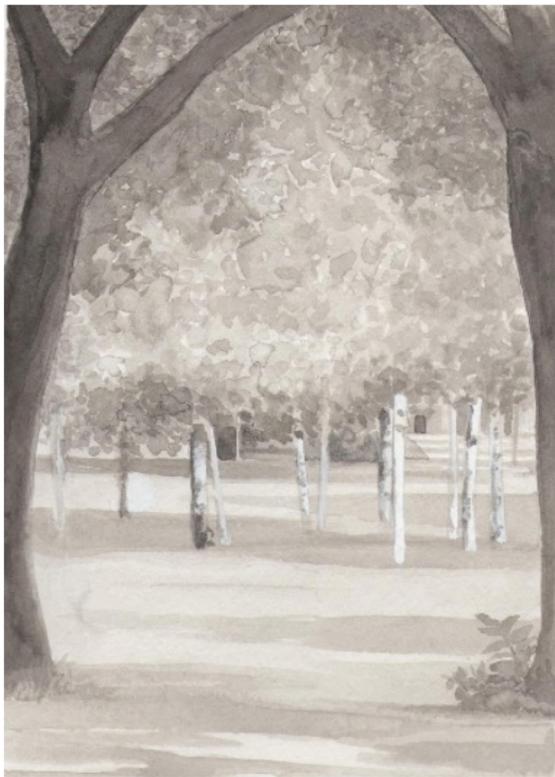
On a radiant summer morning, maple leaves gleam in a jigsaw puzzle of light and shadow against a cloudless blue sky.

~ Horton Park

June 27

A grove of quaking aspen forms an appreciative audience for the day, stiff leaves rattling in the breeze like polite applause.

~ Horton Park



June 28

A bed of astilbe puffs into bloom, like a tiny  
Christmas tree farm in shades of exotic pink.

- Hamline University

June 29

A young tamarack's spindly limbs poke out at all  
angles, like a jumble of pipe cleaners in a child's  
craft box.

- Horton Park

June 30

On the edge of a storm, treetops glint gold against  
steel gray clouds, as thunder rumbles like the belly  
of a hungry giant.

- Horton Park