

## Aliens

What if actual aliens landed?

They'd traveled light years from their home planet—  
one so lovely they wept for what they'd done  
to its seas and forests,  
celestial refugees who no wall or fence could keep out,  
who radar couldn't detect.

Far smarter than us,  
they'd made our mistakes long ago —  
the wars, warming, radiation—  
and set out to seed the universe.

They could communicate without speaking—  
poems, songs, designs, unequivocal statements,  
like *here to stay*.

## **Full Wolf Moon**

On New Year's Day the moon is full,  
Abenaki people said wolves howled in hunger  
outside villages on the first moon after winter solstice,  
some years people were more hungry than wolves.  
Now there are no wolves left here,  
but there are still those who howl with hunger,  
though not from the forest behind my house,  
there are quieter cries from the village,  
where there's a food shelf in a church;  
when the blue moon rises  
on the last day of January,  
people will be out of food again.  
From Earth we cannot see the moon's dark side,  
from the other side of town we hardly ever  
see those who come after work or school,  
so they can have lunch or supper.  
Some come in moonlight  
so they might not be seen,  
or better still in darkness,  
when a cloud passes over the moon,  
ashamed that it's come to this,  
that they must come in hunger.

## **Beneath an Overpass**

The train to Seattle passes  
blue and yellow tents and tarps  
in grey mud near the waterline.  
Farther along, near crisscrossed overpasses,  
downtown on the edge of Puget Sound,  
within sight of a microbrew café,  
people camp on tarps, pallets, cardboard boxes,  
and in tents next to the railroad tracks.

These aren't campgrounds the like state parks  
along Puget Sound; this is the last refuge  
of America's refuse, a city's castoffs—  
the same city as the Space Needle, Microsoft, Starbucks  
and bright lights of Pike Place Market—  
all through November  
cold rain starts and stops,  
drips off bridges.

A woman huddled on a damp tarp lights a candle,  
remembers being a girl in her warm bed,  
she eats a stale muffin,  
later she'll line up for a free meal.  
She tries to sleep while trains pass.  
cars and trucks rumble overhead in fog.  
A ferry crosses to Vashon Island,  
lights on already at four.

## Skull Junction

Way back in the woods  
at a trail junction west of Tangletown,  
sits a steer's skull on a post,  
whose horns point the way—  
hard to miss this grim trail marker—  
a chickadee lands on an eye socket  
and sings.

Coyotes have left tracks all around,  
but this skull is of no interest to them—  
not much meat left on its bones—  
whoever put it here made sure  
I won't lose my way—  
a weird sense of humor.  
It reminds me of heads on pikes,  
though I wasn't around to see  
people decapitated,  
for patting the wrong buttocks,  
or writing the truth about their monarch.

We like to think we've come a long way  
from executioners and heads stuck on sticks,  
far more civilized than those coyotes,  
who may eat stray sheep  
in the woods above Tangletown—  
but what about Jamal,  
the journalist dismembered  
for writing articles a crown prince disliked?  
So is impaling heads on pikes any worse,  
than building nuclear weapons,  
or carpet bombing a country  
until its children starve,  
or killing me for writing about you?

The sun's getting low,  
but I can still make it from Skull Junction down to Tangletown,  
then walk back home on East Hill Road,  
where there are usually no bombs or heads on pikes.

## **Those Who Hunger**

The hungry eat lunch in a church basement,  
come to the food pantry each Saturday,  
those who seek refuge  
are torn from their children at the border,  
those who hunger  
ride trains for days seeking sanctuary,  
the hungry come  
across seas on flimsy boats of flotsam,  
some will die on their journey,  
many will be turned away,  
by angry men—  
but someday—

Esuriéntes implévit bonis:  
et dívites dimísit inánes.  
He hath filled the hungry with good things;  
and the rich he hath sent empty away. \*

\*J.S. Bach Magnificat, Aria A