

Two Tents

sag under snow,
at a picnic area a mile out of town,
home for people who have nowhere else to go.
They've camped since summer
in this patch of woods
next to the Winooski River,
which rushes by but says nothing.
Morning traffic—school busses,
commuters, skiers on their way
to slopes or second homes.
300 feet from their tents,
a brown house with river view,
ten rooms, three car garage,
fireplaces, bright Christmas lights.
Winter night comes early,
for those who live in tents,
snow blows, rattles pines,
cold river rolls over stones,
bones turn to ice.

Birds Without Borders

A dozen gulls feed on fast food scraps,
rest on a tractor trailer
at a New York Thruway service area;
soon more gulls join them,
beaks pointed west,
maybe they know this truck
is headed toward Lake Erie,
though they'd rather fly,
than cling to the top of a trailer,
as it roars down the thruway,
unlike refugees from Honduras,
who must cling to boxcars across Mexico.

The truck roars away beneath their wings,
and twelve gulls ride wind currents,
northwest out over Lake Erie.
Canada geese, redwing blackbirds, a few flickers,
fly south with cargo ships and fishing trawlers far below.
Flocks cross back and forth,
borders, customs booths,
walls, fences, guards with guns all irrelevant,
memory passed bird to bird,
their celestial compass,
flyways older than nations,
as old as these lakes—
wings over water.

Pizza in a Snowstorm

Snow falls on their outstretched arms
outside a convenience store
finally someone gives enough
for two slices and a large coffee
they share a park bench
one warms their hand in the other's pocket
snowflakes alight on pepperoni and onion
crystalline stars which quickly melt away
they share their coffee
eat pizza with tattered gloves
fingers poke out of holes
two crows circle and caw
hoping for a scrap of crust
the scraps of their lives
reduced to one shopping cart,
a ragged tent
and what's left of their pizza—
they toss crusts to crows

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 hungrier 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 can't 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.

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