

Two Poems

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Visitors

At first it's a distant persistent barking, like dogs in the city after midnight. Growing closer, a falsetto yapping fills the air until the cold December sky is darkened by them, a hundred or more wild geese on the wing. In one slow glide they are an arc of brown wings down to where I know there's water, a pond paling in late light that will at their landing blacken with floating goose bodies. Out of some northern nowhere they've wind-sailed to settle overnight this station on their way south, a surface that will take their reflections, the eager image of geese that know by the feel of air and tilt of wind the cold season sniffing at them, ice-teeth snapping. Come morning, the pond will be, under blue sky and harried cloud, only a vacant ragged circle of water reflecting blue sky and harried cloud, the sun a blind white eye blazing in it. It will wear an air of bleak abandonment, be a winter feeling that will start from the surface to harden and harden, thickening to its own opaque, glassy silence without them.

In the Known World

Did the heron I saw swimming in the small pond by the highway imagine—long neck erect and puffed wing feathers curled over its bony frame as it moved across the dull gleam of water—imagine itself a swan? It would have been perplexed, so, by how its three-toed feet slid through the heavy element, finding no purchase. Surely, though, the cock pheasant shining out of the undergrowth, its feathers a blaze among pine needle beige, and the silent wild turkey with its tiny grey head and the metallic dazzle of its back, its bent quiverful of chocolate tail feathers, knew exactly who they were and were at home even in the bright electric green patches of our domesticated grass. When I watch such free creatures, or even see our cats as they pause mid-stride as if deciding precisely why they're doing what they're doing, I can't help thinking of the painted ox and mild-eyed ass at the manger, partakers in their innocent bewilderment of mystery, yet each so solid in its own presence, each follicle of what solders them to the air we share bristling with primary information, a grid of what is beyond what any words can manage—each particle fire-tipped, holding its own settled, elementary, vigilant justice.