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Fall Migration at Brigantine

Don Colburn

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Four Poems · *Don Colburn*

FALL MIGRATION AT BRIGANTINE

Instinct is just a word for comings and goings
we can't explain. November brings snow geese
to where the Jersey shore begins or ends,
this unison of marshgrass and mudflats.
And we too have come, a busful
up from the Smithsonian
in boots, plaid hats and binoculars,
our own brand of protective coloration,
eager for a peek at a green-winged teal
among the pintails, or a stick-rickety heron
fishing from his standstill in the shallows.
Before we'd left the parking lot
someone jotted down *rock dove* and *ring-billed gull*,
and now a coot stalks the mudbank on galoshy feet
while redtails and turkey vultures
kettle high and slow along the thermals.
Across the bay the casino skyline rises
bluish in the haze. There are thresholds
everywhere but no clear lines:
land and water, fresh and salt, wilderness
and honkytonk. A season, this,
for crossing-over: Tundra swans come
and snow geese by thousands down from the Arctic
turn mudflats to a white shimmer. Look!
Another flock, high enough for twilight,
glittery wingbeats trembling the dark sky,
willed south by wind, shoreline, loss
of light, and ancient pulls we don't understand—
we who have gathered to watch
and call them by name.