1979

Vanishing Point

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This morning the slush-runnels lie slack and dry, 
grooves where the year went like the child’s globe 
we moved from house to house to house 
losing first the wobbly skullcap base, 
then the metal cowl showing the latitudes 
that it once swiveled in, until finally 
it was just a ball of junk rolling 
to simplicity: seven continents, seven seas 
kicked under the last bed.

Stephen, let’s not die too soon. 
Everything has happened, but the promises 
still let us go on this way. Today 
is the first day there is no white snow—
only little patches of cinder-gray 
shriveling at the feet of elms, 
and some delta-winged birds I don’t know 
are gliding over with their heads hung 
to see the ground slipping and slipping by.

It’s this vanishing that makes me think 
of you, it’s the fir tree teeming 
with blackbirds, and northbound summer still 
lingering in some remote island off Panama. 
If I barely can connect the main dots 
of your short life, it’s because each station 
where your slow heart finally warmed a room 
is a distance I must move in, the way 
outer space follows us to our work.

In our story, two blackbirds made a pie: 
our poverty was rich with denials, 
and our father, like a frugal king, wore 
his negativity like sable, and took to drink. 
But now we have other, less homemade royalty. 
Why else would these fidgety, wind-bitten 
blackbirds dominate the window if not 
to set off the spring queen as she begins passing 
beneath on her way to the business of death.
now that the carapace of ice has split open
with the frozen children liberated beneath it.
Already they are scattering, and I wish
you were here to tell me what it means
when they dart into the shadow. I think
the crickets will play something sweet into each
of their ears, just as the scrubbed stars wink
when the storm passes, and space bends lower
like the hard-of-hearing, though no one said a thing.