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The Sense God Gave

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THE SENSE GOD GAVE

enough to forage successfully for grains
and grass sprouts in the protected shallows
of coastal marshes, to fatten further
on Yukon berries for a month in the fall

enough to thrust the head forward hissing,
raise the feathers and run full force
at weasels near the breeding grounds, to hold
the wings slightly from the body in an icy
rain to shelter the young

sufficient to be reliable sentries
in the courtyards of Egyptians, Romans
and Greeks, to pull the toy, flower-filled
wooden carts of Christian children
at Easter time, to be favorite
family caretaker of cradle songs,
to be roused on a hillside
and scattered forever
by John Whiteside’s daughter

enough to nest on the wide nest
of the Arctic tundra, to be as gregarious
as the waves on northern summer bays,
to be flocks of sterling in the moonlight,
the color of fog in fog, to assume
the aura of ancient river flyways,
to assume the name
of snow
enough to be and perfectly to be
(even as any saint or angel must)
the full, proliferating,
and ever-multifarious proof
of exactly that measure given

ON BEING EATEN ALIVE

You know the most terrifying ways—giant fish,
reticulate python, saber-toothed cat,
army ants by the hundreds, piranha
by the scores. One can imagine
being scarlet in the blood
of a lion or rolled as pellets
in a wolf’s belly or ossified
in the barrelled bones
of a grizzly bear.

There are those who have been snatched
away without leaving a trace
into the flames (efficient bowels)
of a pine forest on fire or a burning
barn in August and those
who have been taken on rough tongues
of salt, smothered and lost
in a cavern full of sea.

I have seen others disappear
without a cry, wholly ingested,
limbs and hair and voice,
swallowed up irretrievably
by the expanding sac
of insanity.