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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

ever 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.