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this winter is an owl

Michele Marie Desmarais

pretend this winter is an owl
once in a lifetime storms
common now as feathers, grey
unsuitable for light

a tree remembers long claws
years beneath dreams or death
but nothing like this, everything
turning owl in sickness

the car has a wing
oil fields feather their nests
lawns, chemical drunk
yellow like jaundiced eyes
we know

a flock of owls
is not a murder
but a parliament
talk about irony
just don't pretend this winter
isn't an owl
their inaction, my despair
your next trip to the mall.

MICHELE MARIE DESMARAIS (Canadian Métis, Dakota, European) holds a doctorate in Asian studies (Sanskrit) from the University of British Columbia. She is an associate professor of Religious Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and is a faculty member in the Native American studies program. She serves as director of Medical Humanities as well as director of Spirituality, Public Health, and Religious Studies. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Room* and *The Malahat Review*.

sweetgrass

iktomi is walking

one

by

one

by

one

by

one

by

one

by

one

by

one

by

one

he

taps

a

word

up

each

stem

a

long

green

story

go north after custer

move

from untaken skies

to school

in one generation

the kids return

if lucky return

wrung thin

mute with christ

when you're drinking up heaven

it's hard to find medicine

so we disappear

again almost ghosts
but stubborn
right as stone
away from schools
to a homeless coast
where we live
raise up children
with memories that smell
like cedar smoke
returning one day
to our plains
i carry a good
story of salmon
for the earth
who laughs
says i've seen the ocean
says that hair down your back
reminds me of family
of time
& all you relatives
long
long
like a braid
of sweet
sweet
grass

light is a secret
we speak in dark tongues
as we curl together
tangleturttwist
till something says
up
the world says
up
& green the i extends
suddenly
to blue so far
to rise up more
while bursting with roots
with joy to spark thunder
to call all beings
here
all good beings

here
& even iktomi
who's coming here
now
with a story
for us
that is
about
eight
feet
tall

owlmouth

owlmouth is silence
small bones buried
away from ceremony
death dropped a feather
call it knowledge, call it school
or English, words curved
hard into beak
into the language of treaty
of quantum, blood meant
for owls, death eyes deciding
the lives of our time
they taught us to speak
words that contain the wing shadow of owls
they wanted us to learn
one hundred words for genocide
what didn't they say
which is why we speak now
kiss the owl in our minds
goodbye
taanshi
taanshi kiya
nimiyo-ayaan
marsii