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High Latitude

Sweet ants are busy at my feet. One is climbing its lookout tower, a blade of green grass, to ponder the giant that looms casting a dark shadow over its brown granular city and its kingdom—dandelion fields and thick fescue forest. *Is she a threat to us today? (Can she see me? Does she care?)* It shakes its antenna at me, the terrible deity that causes flooding and destruction.

A breeze exhales cool against blue sky. Honey-dipped light soaks the pink plumes of the swaying fountain grass. Members of the night orchestra, a stray grasshopper and a few frogs chirp and sing. Hoarse voices refusing slumber.

The chickadee songs, the “feed me” calls, are gone with June. Instead a pissy, sharp caw is answered with another. CAW! CAW! Which means, “*Hey mother fuckers, winter solstice is coming for you.*” Anxiety wells in my chest. I beg for wings, some way to escape the impending fate of high latitude.

For the third day, a lone hornet punches against the white tin siding to the porch. Tap, tap, bing bing bing. *Help, help. Let me in. Let me in.* The entrance to his former home caulked shut, his family—his queen—entombed inside. After my husband did this deed (per my request) I could hear them from the inside. Tap, tap, bang bang bang. *Let me out, let me breathe.*

Above the window box a silken spider’s web stretches across the top six panes and shimmers in the slanted gold light. Hovering above the pink begonias and the painted coleus the patient spinner, this grand designer, waits for breakfast. “Let it be,” I say.

Squirrel claws scratch into the top of the cedar fence. The rodent clammers west to east, nut in stretched jaw. The obese gray cat, who slept on the concrete patio, suddenly agile. I sit cross-legged in pajamas, holding a mug and in the distance a church bell tolls. Release time for the faithful. It occurs to me that I have grown wings and flown away from something.

I hear a loud, forceful exhale. For a moment I am back on an old refurbished boat (a floating hospital turned tourist

carrier) in Canada, the Broughton Archipelago. A humpback named Guardian (by researchers years before) escorts us from island to island. For a week he never fails to present himself or display his telltale white and charcoal-mottled fingerprint on his fluke. Exhale, inhale, dive. Exhale, inhale, appear from nowhere.

But I am on the edge of Wisconsin. A hot-air balloon—beluga of the stratosphere—swims above the treetops in the sea blue sky and drapes its shadow, breathing heavy over me. Perfect squares in red, yellow, pink, green and blue arrange in a spiral kaleidoscope. Now I am the ant. I can't see who is pulling the ropes but I wave anyway. I'm begging again but this time for validity. *Can they see me? And do they care?*