

Caribou's Shadow

Richard Kemick

The wet grey of watercolour,
re-spilling along the canvas
of thawed-then-frozen snow.



There is hardly anything to be said
for something that is hardly there at all,
a black wing over treetops.



The crow is all throat in her call, the neck's
small feathers. Listen—you can hear
the deep colour of her body, how it collects
the full spectrum of light, and how she will show
the nocturnal earth to do the same.



Today, it both rained and snowed—
the thermometer quivering at zero.
The river greeted the fat flakes
with a gentleness that can only come
from having known something in a former life.
Watching the cotton sky, I try to count
how many lives are worth living.



Dusk. Settling beneath the hem of the pine's branches,
the shadow is absorbed into larger things.
Two miles south, east to west, a pipeline scalpels the forest.
With unflinching consequence, its cutline stares straight
into the moonrise's crystal shine. You can take your boot
and kick your own canyon into the wet snow.
A dark line that slithers behind you like a tail:
the trenches of black our bodies cannot help but carve,
a dimness that follows whenever we move in light.
And I remember the base of the bluffs of the Old Man River,
the University of Lethbridge hunched behind. The guide
—the one with the tight copper coils of hair—
said the building was built flush into the southern coulee

so it would see sunrise to sunset but never see its shadow.
 So the university's motto became Fiat Lux, let there be light,
 which at first I thought was beautiful until the copper coiled guide
 said it was also the motto of her high-school.
 And, come to think of it, it was the motto of mine as well.



Today, there was no sky—only cloud,
 a cave's billowed roof. I can never decide
 which is more beautiful: the boulder
 in pure light or the shape of the shadow
 spilt across it; the song or the echo.



Listen—there's going to fall a day
 when you realize it's impossible to justify
 the space you take up, just like it's impossible
 to love something that's immortal—even God.
 Winter's not even here yet, but you've
 got to start dreaming of summer,
 when you'll have no choice but to exist,
 as the sun casts yourself in long evidence.



Morning. Beneath the tree, you can tell
 by the snow's shadowed dents, caribou were here.
 What we can't see always disappears.
 Something like wind. Something like snow.
 Something made from the scraps of shade we began with.