

# FROSTBITE

Though I saw that  
winter through, I was  
too thin for the task  
and had brought  
the wrong body, packing  
it along with the many  
misguided supplies a  
good-sized grant could buy.

Sitting in our tent,  
nesting on caribou  
over cut spruce,  
the elder of the family  
teased me in Athabaskan:  
“Are you reading? With all  
we did today, you  
should be taking notes.”

Who is studying  
whom?

In the small space of  
a sigh and the popping  
of sap in the stove,  
my calf muscles uncurled and  
the question eased  
the pain until the blood  
swam slowly back,  
pulsing,  
pausing,  
pulsing,  
to scream its silent anger  
to the bears and the stars.

When I undressed and,  
following the ritual orders,  
changed my socks,  
I saw that around  
the prow of my toes  
the tissue had put out  
its white flags, a colony  
of button-sized swans,  
aching with embarrassment,  
riding the current in a  
mute reproof to hubris.



Illustration by Jim M'Guinness

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