

March 22, 2008

The Birds of Winter

by Laura Smyth

As I write this, the sun is bright but beginning to drop in the west, the full moon has been up in the east for hours already and the birch trees outside the kitchen window are still knee-deep in snow. I have joined the birds of winter in a stoic endurance of the first weeks of spring.

By the time I drive to the office in the morning that full moon, now pale and ghostly like the birches, will be a huge yellow disk floating just above the line of still-dark pines, and the mounds of snow lining the road will sparkle when my car lights hit them—a new dusting of powder having fallen overnight.

Moving to the northernmost tip of the Upper Peninsula for my first winter, I am just beginning to understand the full meaning of “thaw” and “freeze;” the beauty of ice and snow, how painful it is to be touched by the wind, how necessary it is to pare down what is necessary.

The world outside is still encased in ice despite the calendar declaring Spring. I haven’t heard the woodpecker pounding outside my window yet, but I listen every day for its loud, insistent declaration of home. I have decided to follow its lead.

As a poet who has felt seized-up, frozen in old, unproductive patterns for too long my spring thaw is overdue. I am staking out my own space again, where and when I can write, who and what can touch me when I need the space to think. As a parent, this is an especially noisy declaration however quietly I make it. But it is necessary to make it. And the woodpecker, I know, will be here any day.

