

Waiting

The Eskimos knew the virtue
of hunkering down, doing nothing.
This is a lesson I long
to learn, being American and full
of need to act, flutter about,
prove something. The old woman
was caught in a blizzard
just a mile from her home.
Sleep was her answer to disorientation.
She drew into herself, bent down, squat,
under a high hunk of ice, kept her rear
warm by sitting on her furry gloves.
Drawing her arms free of sleeves
to cross her breasts, she coiled forward,
snail-like, slept thus through three days
and nights. She wore
Caribou socks of woven grasses
and her mukluks, their stitches
pulled tight with thread of sinew.
Every opening of her garment
gathered perfectly to keep out the cold.
She only awoke to jump about
when the blood turned sluggish.
In the end, the elements spent
their fury, relented, and she rose
to spy her home not far away.
Despite her age, she returned to life.
The newcomers to her ancient world
insisted our new ways are wiser,
but I sometimes try to roll back history,
hear news of homecoming without a map

or highway or cell phone or landmark.
The clatter of machinery, the battering ram
of words are like the magician's sword
slicing about my hidden chamber
inside the deceiver's box,
and I too frantic to stay still
in that tiny place.
Neither can the crowd imagine
that salvation requires so little.

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