

Vespers

November evening

and trumpeter swans pass high above the harbor,

flowing as if current-filled

across a sky slowly numbing to black.

Their necks are stretched like white cord,

their feet tucked tight

beneath wings that open and close like a pulse.

The harbor must appear as flickers to them,

sparks beset by yawning spans of darkness

with myself below, aimless and cold, invisible,

whispering a prayer for swans

and rusty blackbirds, for winter wrens and pipits,

who leave the dismantled nest of summer

to chalk a line across the rising slate of winter.

Their only map a particular vista

that tings the lightness in their bones.

Let mercy fall

on those who trust in destinations

for earth's arc is parceled into endless miles,

so many of them traveled in the dark.

*Tina Johnson*