

Donna Pucciani

Incremental

Snow descends
by thousands of flakes per second,

random as thoughts, sawdust on a pub floor,
or gnats in summer along the canal.

If I were ten again,
I'd be running through them,

their knee-high dunes a forecast
of beach in summer.

I'd stick out my tongue
to catch the infinitesimal ice-crystals,

their silent language echoing
among the naked apple trees.

I'd wonder, as I do now,
how millions of miniscule drops

can freeze in a cloud
and fall from the sky

to accumulate at my feet,
like words in books

that tell our storied lives
in the black dots of print.

The minutes become years,
the years our lives, the flakes snow-banks,

the sand beach-glass with the help
of moon, tides and beer bottles.

Daylight inches towards spring.
Each new dawn wakes me earlier,

each new twilight stays a little longer
in my open hands.

The Heartland

The Heartland is starry tonight
while the rest of the world
lies buried in white drifts
spiraling out of a gray sky.

But our sky is deep blue, dark and pure,
made of suffering and the clarity
of memory, of past snows driven
sideways among the moon-blind barns

where even the owls hide.
We've already been transformed
by the grace of violence,
the floods, the blizzards,

and wind shear that brings down
airplanes and the oldest trees
on the block. I remember times
when willows danced like dervishes

and prairies rose up in crazy dust-funnels.
But things are changing now, and storms
have split around Chicago and head East
to test the endurance of New Yorkers

who are no longer safe in their beds,
but watch and listen for the Furies,
having stocked up on food, water,
and snow shovels.

We, having been there,
pull our sweaters closer
to our tired bodies and smile
into wine glasses or teacups.

The ice angels will visit us again
to make Lake Michigan howl
among the skyscrapers, to sweep
our bones with their crystal wings.

Prayer Rug

Homeless folk carpet the church
after casseroles and bread.
Dawn turns snores
into deep wet coughs
as guests pad to washrooms.

One man, short, compact
and bald, spreads his towel
on the floor in the east corner,
near a side door frozen shut.
He kneels to pray.

From the folding chair
where I give out soap and greetings,
I observe him. He sits back on bare feet,
toes splayed. At intervals, he bends
to touch forehead to ground.

There's no privacy for him
in this refuge of stained glass
and crosses. Other men pass by,
glancing noncommittal at his ritual.
One woman stops, looks at him, at me,
and whispers, in a voice full of Gospel,
"This is a *good* thing."

While she takes toothpaste
from a box and goes to wash
the slumber from her face,
something clear and sweet
hovers in the air above us,
turning this particular space
into a triangle of hope,
where despair is banished
among the coffee pots and sheets.

On a day like this

when the wind chill is minus thirty
and the snow is heaped in gray hills
on grocery store parking lots,
when gusts of wind buffet the car

so hard you grip the wheel,
it's five p.m. and darkness hasn't yet
swallowed day in its black maw.
Little by little the light stays longer

in spite of endless war, famine,
drones that ember civilians into ash
in desert cities, babies deformed
by chemicals from the last war,

the jungles and huts long-forgotten
as we've moved on to other theaters.
In our own cities, gunfire shatters
the nights of homeless men

warming their hands over trashcans.
One out of five humans is hungry right now.
But something mysterious, mythical,
and pink colors the sky over Chicago,

turns the blue of Lake Michigan
into a cherry-colored cloud,
drifts in, then sidles out
into the waiting dark.

Donna Pucciani, a Chicago-based poet, has published poetry on four continents. Her work has been translated into Chinese, Japanese, Italian and German, and has won awards from the Illinois Arts Council, the National Federation of State Poetry Societies, and Poetry on the Lake, among others. Her sixth and most recent book of poems is *A Light Dusting of Breath*.