

BOB VANCE

The Deer That Died This Winter

are in the sun again
along the freeway when the long
snows have finally stopped.
Plough after plough pushed the lanes clean
entombing deer just hit or starved weak in the dusk
until they could not move or see.

The sun opens those layered white caves, exposes
what took months to bury,
bent brown bodies, dull-eyed,
strangely deflated. From their snow pedestals
they are some kind of cold offering to this blue
blue sky. Only the ravens can be grateful.

A man in an orange truck makes his way
along the interstate shoulders and medians. With his pitchfork
he takes those light bodies
and tosses them back into the tamarack swamp.
I pass nearly five of those deer every mile until he arrives.
I recognize each one yards and yards before I pass:

ravens flock up as I approach. Each deer
drapes over its hummock of snow. Its own body
keeps the snow from shrinking as fast as the snowbank
around it, as if each cold altar has been there
since the deep-snow day they died.
There is nothing left of that softness from their eyes.

They do not feel their disembowelling.
The man in the orange truck comes to toss them
to the smaller carcass eaters in the woods.
Jack-in-the-pulpits will press up around their spines
and trout lilies will lean out
bleached, white, empty, eyes.