

# Daniel Wolff

## Canvasback

What have I done in the time I've had?  
Half of what I might have done.

The wind has cut the snowbanks back,  
curved their corners, freed some branches,  
and in all that time all I've managed  
is not to talk about love.

The canvasbacks are busy eating.  
They yank the reeds that clog the current  
and feed on the delicate, knuckled roots.  
If I dove down to black-shell bottom,

what would I find?  
The truth?



# Ice Is Water Under Another Name

Water as ice  
supports a thin layer  
of water as snow—  
which pocks the surface of  
water as ice  
till it sags and eventually  
sinks below.

Ducks can't find  
the water they know  
and circle over  
the closed pond.  
But seagulls simply  
accept (and stand on)  
change.

Here and there  
are marks from where  
swans resisted  
(breaking through),  
or muskrats opened  
hope between  
hidden home and hidden food.

# Thaw

Two ripe days of wet East wind  
have fumed the long black coast—  
pressed the sea and scored its whiteness—  
raised the muddy bottom.  
This isn't it, but the beginning of it.

Along the creek that forms the marsh,  
salt water scours yellow grass  
while stiff-legged gulls walk on lawns  
once exquisite. Now it isn't  
spring or winter. Gutter-screens hang from gutters.

Let's call what tries to stop change  
Pride. Then the seawalls have been humbled.

On the risen water,  
a piece of plywood has drifted free  
and skims along, invisible. Or would be,  
except mallards have made it a raft.  
Land I'm sure of isn't.

# Red-Tailed Hawk

“Easily identified by its distinctive, dark red tail.”  
Easy, maybe, if the northerly wind  
would pin the bird as it rounds the point,

but it blows past, as does another  
—smaller? barred? with black markings?  
Gone before I can see what it is.

No: gone before  
I can tell what it is.

A spotless day for migration: a spray  
of old snow still left on the ground  
and cold: the harbor frozen tight.

I walk as far as the channel markers.  
They’re dark red, too, but anchored in place  
as if you could chart water.