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## Two Poems

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## DEAR BIRD BANDERS

*Something worth telling  
will have happened,  
if I do not come back.*

—Icelandic Saga

On the beach at Indian Island,  
military reserve and bird refuge,  
walking the tide line I found  
one of your bands on the ankle  
of a small skeleton.

Both wings  
were broken; the ants had cleaned  
the bones. The whole assemblage  
fit into two hands.

The tides here are unpredictable;  
currents come from deep  
in the Pacific, slow and far.  
This coast takes a beating.  
The number on your band  
is illegible, though the last  
digit might be 7.

## DRIVING THROUGH THE STORM

At Sixth and Main of Mitchell, South Dakota,  
sparrows swarm on the bicentennial mural of corn—  
all colors of grain spreading in the sun  
the patriotic scene. In the rising wind  
our fathers are alive with birds,  
their arms, guns and drums plucked for food,  
kernel by kernel, seed by seed.

We are driving east to a storm  
suspended so tall and wide it is  
the losers' history, deep mountains  
of defeat, in clouds the many colors  
of darkness—then by the road a sign:  
“Lost Indian Motel.”

At any dangerous time  
we are in exodus toward the past,  
migration without return, and now  
a double rainbow arches over the road;  
the car rocks in the shuddering wind  
like an ark of animals lost at sea;  
gray rain shrouds the earth and us,  
pavement a river of foam.

East of dusk, out from the storm,  
I drive toward where the moon will rise—  
Worthington, Sleepy Eye, Albert Lea—  
my wife beside me knitting in the dark.