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## **Clea Roberts**

### **Winter Ticks**

They say the moose  
are shingled with ticks,  
ticks that gorge  
at the neck and flanks,  
ticks that make  
the skin itch.

It's the catastrophe  
of distraction:  
can't eat, can't sleep—  
eighty thousand  
winter passengers  
each taking  
a thimble of blood.

Trade a winter coat  
for a forest  
of rough barked trees,  
it lets the chill in,  
the dewlap shudders,  
the haunch stone cold.

Bed down  
upwind from hunger  
and still hunger finds you:  
a flurry of paw prints, wing tips,  
entrails radiate, the violent flower  
of skin and bone.