

Ice Bound

By Walter Bargaen

Sky's gray sheet spreads icy rain.
Through the night we heard the branches cracking.
Now they bend with the bowed ache of apostrophes.
Backs to the window, sitting on the couch, we listen
as the radio announces the list of schools closed.

An hour earlier I inched my way along
the road, tires spinning toward the ditch.
Now I read aloud to a teenage daughter,
who tolerates my foolishness, my claim
that Lao Tzu traversed a more slippery world.

With two books open on my lap, one in my hand,
two on the floor, I'm surrounded by imperfect
translations: a gathering chaos; something
mysteriously formed; without beginning,
without end; formless and perfect.

She responds, Sure,
I knew that, so what? I persist:
that existed before the heavens and the earth;
before the universe was born. She's ready to go
upstairs and listen to the radio. I ask,

What was her face before her parents were born?
she answers, Nothing. I ask again.
She says it again. Where are the angels,
nights on humble knees, the psalms of faith,
the saints of daylight? She walks out of the room.

I'm surrounded by thin books.
How pointless to go anywhere on this day,
or maybe any other, but then
the time comes when there is
no other way but to stand firm on ice.

Source: West of West (Bkmk Press, 2007)