

Snowy Owl Near Ocean Shores

By Duane Niatum

A castaway blown south from the arctic tundra
sits on a stump in an abandoned farmer's field.
Beyond the dunes cattails toss and bend as snappy
as the surf, rushing and crashing down the jetty.

His head a swivel of round glances,
his eyes a deeper yellow than the winter sun,
he wonders if the spot two hundred feet away
is a mouse on the crawl from mud hole
to deer-grass patch.

An hour of wind and sleet whips the air,
nothing darts or passes but the river underground.
A North Pole creature shows us how to last.
The wind ruffles his feathers from crown to claw

while he gazes into zeroes the salt-slick rain.
As a double-rainbow before us arcs
sky and owl, we leave him surrendering
to the echo of his white refrain.

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Source: Drawings of the Song Animals (1996)