

# To Swallow Us Whole

by James Claffey

The winter storm wraps itself around our moss-covered stone cottage, like an old memory, relentless and prodding, flinging snow against the windows with the rage of a forgotten grief. The hard earth hides beneath a crumpling of snow, and I sit here, eyeglasses sliding down my nose, struggling to see through the thickening blur of the storm. The east wind probes through the eaves, pushing at the walls, as though it wants to drag us out into the cold, to swallow us whole.

I think of the red-tailed hawk, its sharp eyes and steady wings, cutting through the wind, searching. Somewhere, deep in the snow, its nest lies, fragile as a dream, alone in the frozen world. I circle the room, as if the walls could contain me, as if the clock ticking in the corner could slow time, give me pause. But there is no halting the coming storm. I watch the snow billow against the window, until the landscape becomes a blur, and the only thing left is the quiet whisper of my breath.

In the distance, I can hear the hawk's wings, though I know it's only the wind buffeting a stray plastic bag caught in the branches of a leafless birch tree. The solace I seek is in the waiting, the understanding that everything turns in a circle. Winter will break. The egg will hatch. I will see clearly again. For now, all I can do is hold the warmth of the turf fire, hold the comfort of the banked blaze, and let the storm rage.

