



## **ON THE SHORTEST DAY**

Near sundown I push wet stall bedding and manure from the barn. The dump pile a hundred feet on through frozen ruts, the single tire on the barrow nearly flat. It's maybe ten degrees I gasp in; hard wind building from the sea skims ice lenses as I blink.

The steaming fill still cooks inside out. I could reach my hands to the old hot core, go under. Here and now, it could save me. Bouncing the barrow back cold and hollow, my denim legs die numb. My feet stop again at the edge to draw up heat. On the facing slope, fifty acres of banked alder suddenly catch neon as coals, the damper of sun wide for one minute more, the whole frozen woodland around me, roaring.

Jane Thielsen