

# Tom Sexton

## Selections from *A Ladder of Cranes*

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“First Anna’s Hummingbird Sighted in Newfoundland”

“At first I thought it was a glint off the taillight  
of a car on the road that runs along the bay.  
It was dusk and I was about to make our tea,”  
the older sister who was first to see it told  
the reporter. “Then in the morning we saw  
it at a feeder we’d forgotten to put away,”  
the younger sister said. “It wore a bright red toque  
and the greenest jumper that we’ve ever seen.”  
“If we believed in the little people, I’d say it was  
one of them,” the first sister said, “but we don’t  
and they’re not seen until November anyway.”

“Insomnia”

Sleepless, I watch our birch trees glowing  
even though it's only 3 a.m. Not a sound  
is coming from the snow-covered road.  
How can snow be like light coming down?

This must be how angels once appeared  
to the willing, their great wings silent,  
filling the room with otherworldly light,  
taking their hands, whispering, “Have no fear.”

“Black Spruce”

Outside the cabin’s window, the November  
snow is so deep it seems Li Bai’s frenzied  
Immortals have left the safety of his poems  
to grind all the clouds in the world to a fine  
powder that they’re dumping on the marsh,  
burying the black spruce, even the tallest.  
When spring comes, the spruce will reappear  
tilting in every direction, unsteady revelers,  
green jackets glistening, wearing halos of pollen  
while the last of the snow at their feet disappears.

“Swans on Cook Inlet”

After an early October storm, I watch a pair  
of swans forced to take shelter on the inlet.  
I'm late for supper, but I linger on the trail  
remembering when my marriage was on thin  
ice. I had left two of our tent pegs behind  
and called my wife's offered blueberries bitter.  
I was angry. Our camp stove wouldn't stay lit.  
“Half a continent from home,” she sighed.

When a swan appeared in the darkening sky,  
she said it was the Swan Maiden returning  
to her father's house. Our stove sputtered, died,  
but I managed to keep our wet fire burning.  
Her eyelids and hair were white with frost by dawn.  
The tide's rising. The inlet swans will soon move on.