

Wasteland

By: Mandy McKee

They used to say "If you see the widow on the road,
then kill the widow. Kill the widow."
But there is no widow here.
Only a white-wash of snow, endless

as it creeps onto the streets, curling
to miss a snake of steam
hissing from beneath the manhole.
I wonder if there is a road down there,

slow and sulking beneath the hide of
these sullen tears. And if a widow,
in her gray tatters and ruthless flesh
might extend forward a meager bribe

dull with a cobalt gleam
at first
then a silvery candescence
hot enough to cook the crooked-

mouth fish gasping in her left hand
the dusky scales shivering,
another gasp, long, deep.
A suck of air.

Just walk past, walk past.
Shut your eyes against the
promise of transience.
This road won't last forever.

They say that here, here, this
is the land of promise.
But there is no widow here.
All the bony hands are plump

and their bribes
are a shovel for the grave.
I am too
dazzled by the web of color

that spiders across the curve of snow
an ephemeral touch

of transcendence
And all these wafting tears, chilled

offer only the slightest reconciliation.
The street signs, a glare of green against
the orange cone of falling snow
point to no road.

A canopy of shops with gaudy
neon signs shiver in the waking
cold. A sliver of snow
falls down the neck

of a little girl's coat.
She dances with it
and goes inside to buy
a small, silvery carp

That will die the very next day.