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## The Meal

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### **The Meal**

It is evening and Denali is close  
on the blue-edged horizon.

A jay watches me from atop a ski  
sticking upright from the crusted snow

outside the cabin door, his careful eyes noting  
where crumbs fall from the warm bread in my hand.

From above a scraggly forest  
of black spruce and muskeg

a raven arrives quietly to perch  
across the clear cut. I do not know

if his dark eyes watch me or the crumbs  
lying on the snow. I return to the wood stove,

and looking out the window see the jay  
stealing his meal, and the raven

drifting low over frozen marsh,  
disappearing into darkening trees.

*John Smelcer*

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JOHN SMELCER is the last living member of the Ahtna tribe of Alaska who can read, write, and speak in their severely endangered language. He is the author of 50 books, including his poetry book *Indian Giver* (Leapfrog, 2016).