Susan Johnson’s poems have recently appeared in *North American Review, The Kerf, 3 Nations Anthology,* and *Blueline.* She teaches writing at University of Massachusetts Amherst and lives in South Hadley, Massachusetts.
COVER OF DARKNESS, COVER OF LIGHT

Under cottonwood, under little leaf linden,
under cliff swallows and cliff nesting ravens,
under willow yellow with life and hemlock

yellow with death, under the impression
we will all be here tomorrow and the sun's
rays will refract blue as we walk under

sugar pine, under osprey who know
the fishing here is good, under paper wasp
castles whose cells repeat like wallpaper

repeats creating new patterns that are
really the old pattern even as they fly off
the page, under a ceiling pressed into tin

under renovation, restoration, everything
under repair for which we are under prepared,
underpinning such anxiety, so many tasks

left undone, how little we understand of all
we don't understand, such actions undertaken
under the cover of darkness, cover of light.
SOME PEOPLE ARE CITIES

A woman paints a room so she has a private place to go. She’s hungry so she paints a chicken, paints an egg. I’m not sure how to paint fire, she says. Still the painting invites her in, sets the table for tea. A spider web of steam maps her breath. Smoke becomes ash becomes dust. There’s no escaping, she thinks. She climbs a mountain top but there is no top. A branch just misses her head. The unexamined life is best left unexamined, she thinks, as she watches mergansers on an oak log absorb the roiling below. Who can bother counting the days? Some people are cities, she thinks, their lives a bustle of buildings, sidewalks full of strollers, strivers waiting for the lights to change, their lives to change so they can be more than they seem, become part of the scene, late night displays. Blinking blinking. Wow, All Bags 10 Bucks. And some are forests breathing in a pine needle quiet that ascends root to canopy, canopy to sky, a still sort of motion that pauses between brush stokes finds the blue blazed trail and stumbles on.