

A Waste of Level Snow

By **Patricia Burton**

When you propose to my Trappist imagination a place called Saskatoon I am afraid you draw a blank. All I see is a waste of level snow, broken by igloos. . . . However, I am gradually backing into a Saskatoon and igloo of my own, meaning a cottage in the woods.

*Thomas Merton to Gordon Zahn
December 17, 1964*

The road's been long:
my reindeer, tired and restive
 want to be off-harness, munch their moss,
 lie down to sleep; and so do I.

In the distance, small at first
a mound of crenellated light:
 Igloo! What far-traveller
 has found such snug accommodation?

From every crack and channel of the mound
shines forth the gleam of molten gold.
 (How do I ring the doorbell of this snow-fort?)

My reindeer shake their bells.
The shaman-resident appears
white-clad and gracious, grinning hearty welcome.

Inside, the space unfolds like Snoopy's doghouse.
 (How did he get those shelves of books in here?)
A fireplace, stacks of logs, and in the farther shadows

candle-glow above a consecrated Host.



Patricia A. Burton is an unofficial urban hermit and ITMS member living in Toronto. She works on Thomas Merton as a hobby and has produced the *Index to the Letters of Thomas Merton*, and the *Merton Vade Mecum*, a handy new bibliographic guide.

Patricia A. Burton

Through the long winter night the enchanter holds me,
furnishing endless books like new-made bread,
copious tea in chipped enamel mugs,
toast made over banked-up coals
salty talk and gentle arctic silence.

When we emerge, we find the world new-born.
My reindeer have reverted to the wild,
married the locals, started families.
Their bells hang from a nearby pine, wind-chiming.
My sled upended by a melting bank
is full of nesting birds.

Sounds reawaken. In the distant ground-mist
a fox kit plays. Out of the silence of an age-long winter
the old heart stirs anew.

Point vierge! Kentucky spring!