

Alexis Ivy

TAKING THE HOMELESS CENSUS

The corner of the laundromat is occupied
by the ex-con with an exhausting past.

He uses missing socks as mittens,
trades socks for cigarettes. Homeless:

sitting-on-a-milk-crate homeless,
facial-hair-unkempt homeless,

publically-collecting-cans homeless,
boozing-at-the-duck-pond homeless,

asking-for-the-time homeless.
Teenagers homeless under bridges

living on benches, or beside the heat vents
in the library, chronic homeless

who find refuge in the holes of
stairwells. The habitually homeless

who have lived four episodes
of homeless in the past two years.

The girl who stocks the shelves
at 7 Eleven tells me she lives

on her friends' couches. The man
I buy a muffin for at Dunkin' Donuts

Sunday mornings goes south
to be homeless in Rhode Island

all winter. In public alleyway
118 three vets have built a room

out of furniture left on the street
by undergraduates. A woman

curled up in a Macy's storefront
leans on the six garbage bags

of her life. On any given night
in January at the Shattuck Shelter

someone will clean up, show up,
ask for a toothbrush, dryness,

five packets of sugar, an outlet.
Sign their name on the sign-in

so that they might be given a bed.
As for the rest of us? Uncounted.