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## Branches, Early Spring

They had begun to whisper among themselves,  
hesitant at first, but it was cold you see,  
and had been months cold. They had begun  
to whisper as the ice loosened and thinned  
on the trough, as the moon's startled face  
rose above the blackened hills. I heard them  
whisper, but did not know the moment  
they began, or the precise dawn  
in which they wakened from their stiff  
and dreamless sleep. I know only  
the horses bowed their heads to thatch,  
I pushed the wheelbarrow toward the fence  
where thin shoots blushed with colour, and higher,  
the trees' red sap set the sky on fire.

## Blessing

To be blessed  
said the leaf,  
is to lie finished  
in dark earth,  
my edges starry  
with frost.

To be blessed  
said the branch,  
is to stand naked  
in winter sun,  
my blood rushing gold  
and singing.

To be blessed  
said the gate,  
is to be rusted open  
so that all may pass:  
deer, leaves, wind,  
mice, God.

## Begin Again

After lightning, after thunder broke  
the darkness brooding over the sleeping houses,  
after rain, in silence morning bloomed.  
The grasses lay muddled, rose petals  
littered the dirt, and in that quiet, a bird  
tried her tentative song. The cat  
set a paw outside the barn; the horses,  
rumps shining, weary with running, stood steaming  
as the sun, that minor god, peered  
from behind the clouds  
as if to make some proclamation.  
Then the horses lowered their muzzles to the plain,  
and it was the beginning of the world, again.

## Cat

She'd come home at last  
mewling all night on the porch,  
runt bundle of wild  
fright in her bones  
from the owl  
sweeping the dark,  
and the uncouth cries  
of her owlet young filling  
the trees and the night  
with the black bells  
of their sound.  
She'd come home,  
some furred creature  
swallowed up in her, but now  
she's had enough of wild,  
the open mouth, needle teeth  
of that life;  
she has brought us  
a strangeness riding  
in her eyes: a sky  
of dark cloud built up,  
and the pelting rain.

## Making a Life

And wind, always wind rolled over the land,  
pulling the clouds thin and grey.  
We had to go out — in snow, in cold, no matter —  
I lay the baby in her crib to let her sleep  
or cry. Some part of the fence was down;  
a deer, maybe, or one of the horses run into it  
in the blizzarding dark, or the wind  
had sheared it off, the post long rotted  
but holding taut in the tension of barbed wire  
until, like someone exhausted or dying,  
it could no longer keep itself upright.  
Wind watered my eyes, the razored barbs  
cut my hands through gloves, the bleached  
bones of grass bent with the weight  
of snow. First we had to pull the rusted  
staples out, then the wire off the post,  
the hard wooden knot like a face  
etched with pain. Then a new post to go in:  
the pounding of the maul, my hands  
holding the new post straight; I stood  
unseeing but for a smear of colour, the tremble  
in my bones when my husband hit it clean, each time  
missing my hands, my wrists, the skin  
exposed and fiery with frost. The chokecherry  
beside the cattle guard bloomed with birds  
feasting on the final fruit, one hawk  
on the power line, patient and lonely,  
our child in her crib and her dark hunger.  
My prayer for her sleep. Then the wire, coiled  
like a summer rattler, pulled snug with the claw  
of the hammer I held in place, my feet braced  
in snow hard as love, burrs catching on my socks,  
sleet of tears stinging my face,



my hands just holding on, and my breasts  
sudden with milk. And when we finished,  
the birds scattering from the chokecherry,  
we stepped into the house as her newborn wail  
shattered the air, and I, stunned with cold  
and crying, my breasts burning  
and the milk coming down.