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March

John P. Freeman

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March

Who on earth would hope/for a new beginning
 When the crusted snow/and the ice start thinning?
 —Luci Shaw, *Under the Snowing*

The low cloud cover drifts as slowly
 as windblown piles of snow.
 This is the time
 of earliest budding, like the first curds
 that rise to the surface in a butter churn,
 the time of the hard brown buds
 of the willow oak, with its mauve samaras
 spreading through the limbs like a low-grade fever.
 Though cedar and pine
 have held on to greenness relentlessly,
 elm branches are empty;
 racks of pecan and hickory
 are dry sticks against a sky
 cold and grey as tin.
 Only the dogwood and the redbud
 are flowering now, set deeply within
 the deadened heart of the woods;
 they are coals smoldering, about to touch
 the dry kindling of trees—
 fire in these flowers, fever in my veins
 rising to touch the skin.
 Though the fields are still covered by winter straw
 rattling in the harsh wind,
 tenacious seeds of a hope
 thaw in the frozen stupor of the dirt.

—John P. Freeman