

Ann Williamson

APRIL

The cat and I were awake.  
No one else.  
Grandmother's knitting lay dormant  
As window-sill ivy,  
Loops the same size, the same shape  
And evenly spaced on the vine.  
Cobwebs unraveled the corner  
Of the ceiling.  
Papa's shops were stalled  
By the door,  
But the cat and I went out.  
The sun was hoisting itself  
To the shed's roof,  
But I couldn't help;  
My eyes were on  
Yellow crocus  
Sparkling like ring gems  
Fallen off the palsied trees.

The cat left me  
For one of his lives.  
The puddle of fur  
That fit my lap all winter,  
Rippling at my lightest finger,  
And fed from ponds of milk,  
Was transformed in front of me  
Into a flame-like element  
And leapt the moat of yellow crocus.  
No snow gloved the pitiful trees  
And the cat darted in and out,  
Flickering along those black metacarpals  
Until they snapped and crackled like kindling,  
Then he jumped back to earth  
And sparked off my hands.  
I walked by myself to the clearing.

The buck stood within eyeshot,  
But the sun squinted over the shed.  
I took a few steps closer,  
Before my eyes, the death rack.  
I thought the buck would charge;  
I ran, not stopping at the shed  
Where I could have rolled  
On the safe floor, smothering panic.  
Papa's shoes were stamping in the yard,  
And papa lowered his head,  
Scooping me up  
On the points of his annoyance.

Inside the house,  
I couldn't have seen  
A fully racked buck.  
Papa knew all about deer;  
They lose their antlers by February,  
Grow a new pair every year.  
What I had seen was a harmless pony,  
Nothing.

I lowered my eyes  
To the window-sill ivy;  
Caravans of vines and leaves  
Knelt into the window light.  
Grandmother looked at me  
Over useless eyeglass,  
She knew all about the forest.  
I'd seen a spirit king.  
I could touch poison ivy,  
Put blue eggs back in their nests  
Without taint.  
Under its rack of ivory needles,  
Grandmother's knitting  
Stirred in her lap.

