

FIRST SNOW AUBADE

**MICHELLE
MENTING**

Suncups pock the feeder now, and the birds
scratch seeds from flakes. Last night, we thought
we heard a loon lost in the middle of November.
How it must have fallen out of August and spent
the months of autumn concussed to finally wake
in this sudden preamble of winter. We were wrong,
of course. In this wind and forest of naked limbs,
words are sparse and the leaves rustle away any sense
in syntax. This is true: now is not the partnering time.
Why is it when the leaves color and break, we too
and we two part with our solitary migrations?
The temperature drops outside and inside, and further
inside the valves of our hearts solidify as if becoming
oak stems: so brittle each pump threatens to break
artery from organ. But this is wrong. We are healthy
but changing and mishear what we say, what goes on
around inside this house and outside above
the fingered limbs of oak and birch. We want to hear
a loon's tremolo, we want its weep and wail,
its calling to a mate. We want the longing to be real,
and a sound so sorrowful of yearning, it would weep
the frost far off the needles of pines and crack the rime
from the cattails in the wetlands (we once knew as mossy,

as warm and deep). We want, but even the effort of want
fails to surprise us into thawing. At dawn, on my walk
to feed the chickadees, I found two squirrels. Their heads
removed, and at the stumps of their necks, the reddest berries
of blood. And something stirred inside. Outside, beyond
the knotted fingers of forest, I saw a hawk lift off atop
the tallest pine. When its talons released the branch,
frost shattered and fell into flakes that waved and flashed
in the opening sun. With each flap of its wings
the sound wavered, created a false tremolo misheard
as wailing. And I was too slow to cover my ears
to block out that bird's call, its voice that spears
the morning fog, that marks the severance of warmth.