

# 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