

Wintermouth

Even the column of steam out of the powerhouse chimney
is ashengold this morning. *Tormented and melodious*,
someone said of Celan—the way the robins were yesterday
in their flutterjazz between branches. Now all is shadow,

all blind white, the world wears a second skin, keeps itself
at the point of freezing. I feel at times like this—buried
in work and absence—the way the stream might feel when
ice bites deep and deeper, silence of ice forming, gradual

contraction of everything to one solid slab of cold. Only,
down and down, there is an underneath, and down
there, cold as it is, water is moving still, and blind
mouths make a way through it, tasting their own blood

pulsing—that trim little engine, the heart, beating out
the sound life going on and on in the cold. I let
my tongue test the element: words may follow
from where the lungs' urgent little furnace is glowing.

Passerine

Tucked into leaf-crush, this small bird—a sparrow—is a brown shadow stippled by shadows of magnolia leaves, their sharp edges exactly rendered and becoming part of

the design the bird's back and wings are, art and nature meeting, being one, for a minute here, this bird in its home from home magnolia becomes a just presence, passing

into my eye as I walk past without pausing at all except to register bird-head, eye, the edgy fluttering of wings that tells me my transit—as of a planet—is being noted

and may startle some cellular alarm unless I keep going, be only a passenger, a passer-by. When I become a thing of the past, the bird must feel easier, settling into its

mixed existence of light and shade, art and life, its own minute body a reminder of what is solid and what flashes darkly over—light, shade, and one small brown morsel

of elemental energy acting and reacting in it.