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Father

Joan Swift

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Father · Joan Swift

In the dining room painting of my childhood
the sheep are lost in a blizzard.
Against wild roses, they lean brown wool to brown wool
under the snow's diagonal.
The flakes gather in furrows on their coats
like a field where nothing is planted yet.
Their hooves disappear and all the soft parts
between their front and their back legs
are buried in weather.

Sheep can't say *cold* or *alone* or *save me*.
They can't say *where is the shepherd?*
A horse stamps in a barn somewhere not in the painting.
At the edges the sky is black and the center is blacker.
The sheep close their eyes against the wind.
For years they are closed.

Waiting for them to open in a bewilderment of spring
flowers, I drink snow milk snow milk.

I wait forever.