

NIGHT THOUGHTS

They're on the move again, across the soundless
moonlit snow, five deer
single file along the narrow trail they deepen
night after night with their heart-shaped
hooves. Shivering, I watch them.
Back in bed, in flannel up to my nose,
I listen and listen. In my mind
already the pipes have frozen
and burst, water in a cascade
that resembles plumes of ice down rock face
along the interstate. In my mind
this house is a hovel of ice; outside,
wolves howl, opposing armies
clash and scatter, a blue hand
sticks out of the snow. Almost,
I reach to take it. I'm here alone—
no, I'm not alone, I'm one of the women
left to wander crazed in snow,
the men conscripted, the villages burned.
And then here it is, like a revision of history,
the click of the furnace, O blessed click!
Of course by now I'm too awake
to sleep, and because there's something else
I don't want to remember,
and perhaps to spice the residue of my fear,
I tell myself the story of the monk
who's fallen just over the lip of a cliff.
There he is, holding on to a root
that's slowly coming loose,
and if that's not enough, a tiger
crouches above him on the precipice.
Just then, as if an invisible furnace
clicks on, he discovers within his reach
on the cliff face the single bounty
of an inauspicious planting,
a beautiful berry, fully ripe. Serenely,
the monk picks the berry and eats—delicious!
And as he falls, I realize what's at work
in this poem and all the rest I write.
Each poem I rescue my fear with a berry.
One could say it works: the fear vanishes.
So does the berry and, momentarily, so do I.

To vanish is to live at the heart of the matter;
to vanish is to live at the lip of invitation,
embraced by emptiness and great joy.
Just so, one dark night after *Zazen-kai*,
freezing cold on the beach, last birds wheeling
over the snow at the edge of the ocean,
at the edge of the world, clear how we felt,
we reached out for each other,
no hope of remedy or rescue, no time for fear.
There was only the moment, and the embracing.
Just that. When we walked back over the dunes,
I could see as if from a great height, as if
from the other side of death— two figures
ink-brushed on groundless black and white,
two figures along a curve of road as if in a painting
by Charles Chu—who, whenever he was done,
bless him, lifted his brush, stepped back
from his work, and let loose a tremendous *Ha!*