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Martha

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When pheasants cross the lawn, when ornaments—
 Red-winged and fleet, fragile and small—bedeck
 The barren limb? Whatever cause or accident

Has brought this faded world, has taught our ear
 A sharper sound to find the smallest scene,
 To know the silence first sustained, then hear

It cleft by timid bird with brief staccato theme;
 But, most of all, it is the pause we hear—that long,
 That breathless pause preludes the stir to song.

SANFORD B. MEECH

MARTHA

My grandmother went to the old orchard,
 sometimes, with a hoe
 to kill what some called adders—
 who forsook the apples
 for the name. Once

she had to pin me on a sofa
 between her knees
 to pick my face for glass and gravel.
 Her daughters—her daughters
 came up halfway to the mark,
 now scurrying with clean or bloody water,
 now tearful in the kitchen.

She would have thought it proper
 that when the pallbearers were clumsy
 in the snow my father motioned me
 to help line up her coffin
 on the straps across the grave.