

Snow

It was as the snow started falling again
that she blurted it out, so they were all
just standing there gazing up, knee-deep
in snow, the little one thigh-deep,
when they heard it, the news that slipped
out like a necklace from a sleeve,
not meant for the kids, not meant for here,
for the snowwoman with her pink hat
and old carrot nose, for the creaking
pines, the cracked plastic sled, the neat
rabbit tracks that shied all over the white
field. So they stood there, the little one
lost in any case in this too white world,
his too cold hands stiff in his wet wool
gloves, his feet stuck somewhere
miles down below. And once it was out
she wished she could call it back in,
like a dog you could whistle to,
but it wouldn't, you couldn't,
so they stood there in the snow,
and the big one asked, of course,
'what's that?' and his dad just looked
straight back at her, his clove-brown eyes
soft with fear, the hound's sour breath
hot on the nape of his neck.

The Butterfly House

His eyelids are itchy red.
Under each eye,
a sealed pool of grey.

In the butterfly house
his skin moistens and his breathing
starts to ease. We stay for hours
as he tiptoes in the muggy air,
peering under giant leaves
to seek out blue morphos, tailed jays,
flambeaus, lacewings, the soulful
mimic eyes of the owl butterfly.

But it is the resting atlas moth
that draws him, with its mapped,
furry wings, each tip the perfectly
painted head of a snake. Surrounded
by a glut of nectar, it cannot drink.
Without a proboscis, it lives
on its stores, then dies.

It worries him.
He knows too much
about short lives, appetite,
about time that wears
as ragged as storm-blown wings.