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Portrait of Fox and Hare

MAC ALLEN

Hare

Winter has settled firmly in the woods
drawn together huddled masses
and the warren is dark and warm
burrows filled to bursting with thickset
bodies pressed tight for desperate shelter

She waits above, in snow slurry
soaked and shivering to the bone
watching ice melt in early morning sunlight
dipped low on the horizon

She's spent a week underground
in the dirt and the dark and the warm
The cold and light are biting
nipping like hound dogs at her heels
The dandelions are months away
her hunger is ravenous and desperate
a sharp thing tugging violently at her flank

A stick snaps and she leaps
throwing snow and dirt in sloping arcs
peeling away through the melting slush

Fox

she gives chase—
she really shouldn't—

it's easy in the end

it's not the thrill of the catch
the victory or the chase itself
but the giving in
the succumbing
to the rush of blood
the syncing of heart to feet
mouth wet in desperation

snow and dirt fly
she ducks low
closing in one foot
then another

they've done this before
the two of them chase
each other about these woods
in early spring dandelions
late autumn fennel
summer clover and this
the half melted snow

it's a game
the fox's teeth to the hare's throat
the hare's claws at the fox's belly
and the blood spells their love
better than the words ever could