

**MICHAEL JOYCE**

**Uppsala Sunday Morning, February**

*I am really in love with these bare branches in front of a lead-colored sky. It is as if they were letters in a strange language, trying to tell me something.*

—Lars Gustafsson, *The Death of a Beekeeper*

It is the strangeness that consoles the oaks along the allée in the sunlight that stuns all that moves this February morning. They keep their counsel and welcome back the songbirds and meanwhile know the leaden light will live out its term, even these peeping creatures once again growing mute.

We all are silent, walking townsfolk, infants in prams, along the cindered paths that follow the frozen river, the speed skater in her long strides suspended numb with promise, a statue on the rink in stop-time bent toward the future, aerodynamic arms clasped behind pewter-colored tights molding the thighs and buttocks above the sheer silver plinth.

This smelter's silence my father would have recognized, raking aside a skim of crusty slag at the open hearth in his thick felt tunic and asbestos mittens, a molten spark occasionally spitting out fulvous as this low sun, turning dull as it cooled into a worm upon the metal-studded gloves, winter or summer he, too, a man of stolid silence, trying to tell me something.