

**J.T. LEDBETTER**

**after oats they lie down**

when last light falls out of the sycamores  
into the horse tank work horses plunge their soft noses  
into the cold water their backs steaming in the snow

after oats they lie down in straw kicking their legs in their dreams  
their eyes white at shadows running beside them

the man waits for the tea kettle pluming on the stove  
upstairs his wife combs out her long grey hair and lies down

he cups the hot tea inside his coat and goes to the barn to help the mother  
birth the colt then lies down in the bloody stall  
watching her nibble at the sack her lips pulled away from her teeth

later he sits in the kitchen with some cold meat and dips a piece of bread in his tea  
he sits very still because the blood on his clothes is hard  
he does not know his wife has died nor will he know what to do  
he will sit beside her until morning then call a neighbor  
and wonder if he should turn off something

he will go to the barn to throw down some hay and listen to the pigeons  
thrumming against the tin roof  
and when shadows move from Turley's Woods toward the farm  
he knows they wait to press their farm bodies against him  
wanting to hear how it is with him now  
he thinks he could go in if he walks through the wild plum orchard  
if he crosses the old bridge into the high corn