

The Gift

Crisp air bites deep in your lungs,
in that moment of morning,
just before dawn, just before
the settled snow turns again to white,
and breath hangs near your face
like your only trusted friend.
You pause on your front porch,
considering all that virgin span,
the steps that would break it,
making again the path that could take you
from and to and away.
In hours the house will erupt with joy,
small fingers tearing through paper and bows,
reaching deep to the toe of a big red stocking
to capture the walnut there.
You have smiled at such times as these,
not letting them see the pain you bear,
telling instead of flying deer
and babies born in the straw.
Another breath, the air is cold,
and you shiver where you stand.
Far down the street another car turns
to go the other way, and you watch until it fades,
and you pull his coat around you,
all the silence there embracing,

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holding still, like smoke above each house
on Christmas Day.

Into the hush a thin, small voice:

"Mommy, did Santa come?"

And the greatest gift received that day

is the one you always give

as you say "Yes, my babies, Santa came,"

and you walk into the house and close the door.