

**March Morning**

In the stupor of rising, half-wakened,  
I walked out to the first leaves

shot out of the branches like hands  
in a soundless birthing cry, the plum  
blossoms clustered, bees on a dark

stick. Blinking I stared. Car-killed, mashed,  
with the sun still in its eye, hung

in the mouth of my happy shepherd  
was the orange, nameless cat  
brought here last summer when

mouse droppings peppered my doorstep.  
If you've ever felt a dog-toy to any man

you'll know why I pressed  
the Alsatian's soft lips  
against its certain teeth

to force the jaw to let go its gift  
and laid that cat out straight-away

in an earth-wrenched church  
of weeds and rotted bark. Still wild, shining  
with small yellow stones for eyes and limbs too stiff to rest,

it didn't sleep. It was caught, paw-bent,  
in a leap it couldn't finish, there

beneath the drops of light and leaf-shadows  
blown on the stucco fence  
that fluttered then like flakes of ash.

*D. J. Smith*