

Brenda Riches/ some mornings

she burns the toast some mornings she
doesn't some mornings no one wants toast and if she's made some
already she gives it to the dog and if she hasn't made any she doesn't
some mornings she wakes up and feels death in her stomach
and is afraid of the dark if she has woken up before dawn and is
afraid of the faint daylight if she has woken up after dawn and gets
up when the fear hugs her too tightly and puts a kettle on cleans her
teeth wipes her face with a damp washcloth and when the kettle boils
makes tea pours it drinks it feels a little safer some mornings she
wakes up and accepts death in her stomach and lies looking at the
part of the room she happens to be facing maybe it's the open closet
where too many clothes hang most of them she hasn't worn for years
but won't throw them out maybe the children will use them for
costume parties or hallowe'en maybe it's the ceiling where the lamp
hangs on its long wire dust on the paper shade she never wipes it off
maybe it's the man's back or his face asleep accepting death in
her stomach she can get up and put on the kettle clean her teeth
wipe her face make tea pour it pour it from pot to cup to stomach
and the hot tea warms the death that has settled there when she
opens the basement door out walks the kitten purring finds a dust
ball to play with leaps around his ball of dust picks it up in his fine
teeth spits it out performs his dance for the imagined mouse the one
mouse he will never taste because there are no mice in her house only
dust balls and the fantasy of a black kitten one by one the
children are woken when she tells them the time she tells them it's
time for them to wake up but doesn't kiss them because their waking

faces are so frail she doesn't want to risk them with the touch of her mouth they have clocks in their rooms but she is the one who wakes them one by one the children come into the kitchen one with heavy eyes one with a finger in her mouth one singing all of them not hungry not wanting anything to eat but you must she says you can't go to school on an empty stomach but she doesn't eat her stomach isn't empty not with death lying there just as long as death lies there her stomach will never be empty so she fills the children with milk and toast or pieces of apple that they only nibble at soon they are out of the house and on their way to school while she sits at the table looking at the partly eaten toast the half empty glasses of milk the bitten apple pieces the chairs where they had sat and frowned there she sits and waits for the man to wake up