

EMPIRE

Rain-glutted, the stream
splays to the base
of the retaining wall.

Good. Now you have reason
to pray. Of all the birds
watching from winter-stripped

trees, vultures
are kindest, killing
nothing. This is a true

measure of things.
Don't hold back now, have
chocolate, throw extra

kindling on, even though
skies urge cover & hoarding.
When mice pitter in

for crumbs, compliment
their small feet and fitting
ways. When your mouth

houses a curse, swallow,
think how you once
had no words at all

yet managed
your hungers. Everything
that comes, passes.

Everything that passes
rakes its fingers through
and passes.



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Poet **Kathleen Lynch**'s *Hinge* won the 2006 Black Zinnias Press National Poetry Prize. She lives in California and online at www.kathleenlynch.com. This poem was first published as "The Hard Season" in *Poetry Magazine*. Artist **Helen Beckman Kaplan** is a painter from Brooklyn. In New York, she has exhibited work at AC Project Room and Edward Thorp Gallery.

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