*The Leaf That Catches*

I come

 to pay my last

respects to a wood

in its death throes, following

a grey breath

that gives shape

 to the stillness of

 the season, like the ice

panes sounding under

foot, the grey branch

breaking under boots, as

the grey skies draw near

 in the leaf-empty

 wood, whose breath

 defeats a buttoned collar, cinches

 the throat with a noose-

 like scarf, drives

 hands deeper into

 pockets, and a chin

 into its chest, where

 all sound

 heeding the wing-beats

 of the geese, has gone

 save, one

 the ringing in my ears

 of a wood-wide quietude

 that disquiets

 a soul, out of season

 in this grey place

 who though alone

 walks in the company

 of an Other, unseen

 moving through the wood

like a shadow

 in flat light, a fear

 peeking around pines

 I have already passed, as if

in following a fresh

 track, I find my own

 is followed too. Where

 all is hushed, but

 for a raven’s caw, and

 the sky empty but

for the black oak’s raven

claw. Where

 smokes are slanting

 from the oaks, like ghosts

 from wooden crypts, giving

 breath to my own

 death, as though I walked

 among the dead in a wooded

 brotherhood. I turned and

 fled from the wood

 as from a premonition

 only to find instead

 that it had followed

 me home, for

 the screen that flickered

 was a raven’s wood

 of words, each a caw

that circled a fresh

 winter kill in my heart:

 “Steve passed peacefully

 At 5:15 p.m. yesterday.

KateandJessieandI

 were holding his hands

 and his feet, while his favorite song

 ‘Time to Say Goodbye’

 was playing. When

it reached

the end

 he breathed

three times

 quickly and

was gone.” Snowflakes

drifting, curtain

 folds, a leaf

 sifting onto

a window sill. A

 blanket that always rose

 after it fell, now lies

 still as a wood

 when snowflakes cease, ringing

with the farewell sighs

of a forest laid to rest, with

 the stabbing grace of

 a leaf that catches

 in the empty webbing

 of my chest.