*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.