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This Business of Dying

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THIS BUSINESS OF DYING

I don't care at all who died today.
There's not a single reason
to list the deaths today.
Maybe my father opens the sports page
or my mother a mystery novel
in New York this afternoon,
a place where on another day
I could follow death like a woman
into the subway, where death
is just a headline, where boys
light freezing derelicts on fire.

So let's forget who died today,
the families, their keepsakes, the clumsy last breaths.
Because this afternoon I know
I've invested my heart in good places,
that if this woman drops off to sleep
right now I'll still be here exhaling,
feeling guilty but lucky,
like a man with no connections.

Because everyone left for work today
loving their children but cursing their lives.
Some union men, on strike again,
lounged in taverns,
lost count of their beers

as I've lost count of these hours,
this afternoon, the days I've run through,
and the women who moved me
this far, so far from my death.