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My Dead Grandfather

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MY DEAD GRANDFATHER

My dead grandfather no longer lives in his apartment

though his last dishes are clean in the dishwasher,

though his leather gym bag lies unzipped in a grimace

behind the bedroom closet door. My dead grandfather
does not sit at his desk and write checks
to black civic organizations with his pen anchored
in agate. My dead white grandfather whose skin
will not retain its significance does not underline
scores at the tops of prisoners’ Christian curricula.

He neither shambles across the hall for one ex-wife’s pot roast
nor drives ten minutes over state lines to make claims
on morning coffee with his first ex-wife. When I open
the cabinets and every drawer in his apartment,
my dead grandfather does not prevent me from considering
the hand-held vacuum cleaner, the two small wine glasses,
the elegant hammer and book seal with his initials, also mine.

My dead grandfather stays at the church where he is boxed

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in a manly crate of brass and satin. I am not afraid, when we arrive, of his withered mouth sewn straight over ceramic teeth, of the drill-row forehead unable to imply a thing from temper to concentration, the hands improbably folded one over the other, the knuckles wax-museum pale. I am not afraid of the body that has been through the busted-brick labor of dying, not of its shrunkeness, its itness, its pall. And yet a grandfather is a notion that does not ash away like a last cigarette ground into pavement. My dead grandfather, laid out in a fine blue suit at the altar of Lansing First Reformed. Myself a child who has touched his things.