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.