

The Bier of Autumn

The dry leaves
Fragile, curled and almost drained of color
Are mounded like the bier of autumn

Surrounded by a small group, hunched and bundled
For now, in deep October, the chill is sudden to the bones.

In quiet tones of distance
They are speaking of the harvest and the longing
And all the changing colors of the days and years
That drift so ineluctably beyond the reach of everything
But reminiscence.

They hear the quick wind
Clicking in the weeds across the lane
They listen to the smoldering crackle of the coming flames

The slow smoke twists and rises into darkness
Its husky odor settling into coats and scarves

The voices drop away to silence

The yellow flames are splendid now
Translucent spires flaring brilliantly against the night

It is as if the burning
Coaxed the residue of autumn's brightness from the leaves
Before they dwindle down to whiteness and to ash.

—Randall L. Hall