

## 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