

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

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.