

Sermon of the Fallen · *David Bottoms*

From an east window
a screen of light sliced across the walnut box.
I sat and watched the grain rise dark,
and listened to him tell
how muscles wither under the skin
and the skin dries and flakes away from the bone
like gray bark flaking from the trunk of a fallen pine,
how the forest trembles only once as the tree falls
and somewhere a bird whimpers from a ridge,
then nothing,
and what needles are left yellow-green
and clinging to limbs
shimmer only a few more times in the rain, then lose
all color and drop away,
and the gray pine shines through the bark like bone,
cracks and sours, softens with larva,
collapses in forest shadow, belches gas
from its grainy soup, dries
in sun to a black forest dust, then seeps
with one last rain through the pine-needle floor
and becomes earth. So, he said, you had come to fall.
Even as a boy, I could feel the trembling in us all.