

We visit the cemetery where you might be buried

by Ellen L. LaFleche

Twin willows flank the wrought iron gates.
Dante-esque, but we enter:
the weeping begins here.

Here the dead are tucked into their lairs,
safe in their stone vaults from snow, thunder, sorrow,
the scavenger's bone-gnaw and clawing.

We pass the obligatory angel with her face in her hands,
pass the cherub with its fractured
wings, buttocks straining against the stone folds of its robes.

We pass the windowless crypt—
winter's storehouse of corpses.
It can't be true, it can't,
but I hear a creaking,
see the crypt's wooden door shiver on its hinges.

We find your Irish grandmother, five decades gone she is,
her headstone warm as bread against our palms.
I can't help wonder—
how long did Brigid's red hair flame in the grave?

She's dead beyond prayers, you say,
but you kneel anyway, your face in your hands.
There's no room for you in your family's plot—
a small, familiar sorrow.

Behind the caretaker's shed
we find headstones with French surnames.
My grandfather *Beausoleil* is here. I can't help wonder:
does his soul's *Beautiful Sun* flame bright in the grave?

Five steps down
we enter the next level of the dead.
A white-washed chapel,
willows fringing a pond so blue there must be dye
in the water. Mated swans swim infinite Moebius loops.

We walk among the pre-paid plots,
the gravestones spaced in perfect rows like dominoes.

The lawn here is pampered,
groomed with rake and blade and sprinkler.

A metal sign is nailed to a tree.
No pets. No picnics. No flower pots.

Your cane stabs the manicured grass.
Forget this place. I'd rather be cremated.