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VISITING FROST’S GRAVE

You have to know where you’re going—
down the dead end road
by the Old First Congregational Church
and the plot’s not clearly marked—
you find it by the tiny wooden sign
and the cement walk leading from the main path
to the grave. There’s a stand
of snow-snapped birches and a slab of granite,
table-size, lying flat, embedded in the earth.
Downhill, a dozen yellow school buses rumble by.
From here, you can see all Bennington and beyond
to the mountains, brown still,
too soon in this cold spring for his early leaf—
its transient gold.
A bell rings somewhere.

Who knows what calling in myself
has called me here?
Next over, the Lathams’ grave is a granite bench
as if they knew I’d need one. I sit,
surrounded by a swarm of tiny flies.
My shadow (or my shade?) sits before me
like a herald of things to come; her hair moves
in the slightest shift of wind.

A grave below tends
toward a red-bowed wreath, dried brown,
that leans against it.
How many buried with him?—his wife
and children, six in all,
and all but two dead before he was.
His epigraph—I had a lover’s quarrel with the world,
and Elinor’s—Wing to wing and oar to oar.
They must have held each other up. I check to see
what other mourner might be near
and finding none, step on the gravestone
and walk it slowly, with my eyes closed—
four strides exactly, and four strides back.
Old man, old quarreler,
I can hear you grumble under my feet—
understand—I’ve stood on you for years.