The Red Coat

It’s sleeting when we walk from the white church, the ground frozen, the brown grass brittle. I am somewhat back in the long black line of mourners, behind my sisters, their husbands and children. I see it all as it’s happening as though it’s not happening. The roses on the polished oak of my father’s coffin are sheeting with ice and I know the red coat is too thin to keep my mother warm. She’s not shivering. She walks across the breaking grass behind the coffin slowly and with great dignity—without her oxygen tank, her mouth open, a rose filled with snow. She’s walking toward something silver and mechanical, like a fence around the grave. There’s a canopy imprinted with the logo of the funeral home, Herndon and Sons, and four rows of white plastic chairs and the artificial grass. A blue tarp covers a red clay pile of earth. We aren’t supposed to notice these things. Bits of color in wool hats and scarves and the red coat. My mother was determined to wear the red coat which I’d bought for myself but gave to her because she loved it, because it is the color that he loved on her, because I could not bear her not having anything she loved.