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Relinquishing

(25 November 1975—Los Angeles)

Already cold, your quiet body lies,
The ravage done, small protest to the sheet.
Beyond your window through November skies,
Sycamore leaves go drifting to the street.

I muse beside the window as they fall,
So yellow now, six months ago so green.
I recognize an effort to console:
They do not fall for whom they fall unseen.

We did not know how softly you would die,
Who might have bled at any orifice.
You simply loosed a final, shallow sigh.
Your cheek is chill, but dry, beneath my kiss.

The nurses in the hallway, speaking low,
Await me now, impatient to proceed.
The yellow leaves are noiseless as they go,
But fall so easily—and gather speed.

I pass the nurses waiting in the hall
And take the nearest elevator down.
I shall invoke the grace of autumn's pall
When winter fades November leaves to brown.

And in six months, when kindled green denies
A gold cortege could ever fill the street,
I shall not fail to bless November skies.
I shall be glad death chose to be discreet.