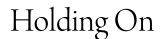


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## HOLDING ON by Joe Benevento

Some oak trees keep half or more than half their leaves into winter, even though those leaves are dead and brown, even though the trees will have to let them go before new ones may green their stubborn limbs again. I have lived with oak trees all my life, there are some in front of my office window right now, clutching bits of January ice and snow in a sullen lethargy of leaves, but I never was aware how they held on to death until I bought a house in May, waited for my oak trees to unleaf, so I could cart death off all at once, in dark garbage bags. Now I wait almost patiently for April, knowing those leaves must come down, however long winter seems to linger, knowing new life is at least as inevitable, as formidable as dying; their place is on the ground, rotting a solemn song of cycles and seasons.