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Joe Benevento

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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.