Elegy in an American Graveyard, Prose/Poem 3/27/2014

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Elegy in an American Graveyard

Fall’s leaves lie sere
rustling between the stones.
Gazing up from the gate in front,
this graveyard is a mandible,

its missing teeth occasional gaps
among the grey/white stones.
Adrift, I wake to chill drizzle.
Now dusk’s obscuring names,

and the small stones all about.
So many died as babes and children.
And adults, only taught for their trade
rather than for the treasure of their dreams.

A coarser rain now pelts the earth.
I shelter under a pine across the road.

Thomas Gray’s 1751,
“Elegy in a Country Churchyard.”
Regrets such wasted human worth
Yet was resigned to inequity on earth

with patient belief in a more just heaven.
The Revolution of Science had only begun.
No writer, then, could imagine how
productive would be technology,

so the workdays and weeks would shrink.
Infant mortality and children’s deaths
decrease, for the science of medicine
much improved public health.

Yet wasted lives persist,
as science makes only the rich more rich.
How can we, in our indifferent day,
muffle the sobs of a homeless mother

steeped in sorrow for her helpless child,
or blur from our eyes a veteran begging,
abandoned after the misuse of his youth?
The yard’s now darkened by a black cloud,

an inkpot spilt across the sky.
A sudden flash of lightning fury.
We who are living today must seek
what these dead never knew—
the chance to grow beyond our jobs.
A small share of the wealth science
has created, and will accelerate,
could assuage the plague of poverty,
with no more children homeless.
No more graveyard lives.