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## The Silent Way of Leaves

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# THE SILENT WAY OF LEAVES

— by Ernestine Gravley

As spring began to stir, an old oak fell. . .  
A noble man of eighty years and nine.  
We left him near a sweet magnolia tree  
Whose blossoms dropped and wept upon his bed  
Of sacred soil. We gave to him a clutch  
Of earth. . . farmer's earth. . . to lull his rest.  
Embraced by elms, the ivy-smothered house  
He left behind (and long we called it home)  
Would fall to strangers. Yet our memories stayed:  
The dogwood branch that tapped the windowpane,  
The blazing stamp of sunlight on the wall,  
The clay pots hanging in the balcony  
Where violets bloomed and ever bloomed again.  
We knew the creak of every darkened floor  
The hiss and clank of steam heat from below.  
The red flocked paper in the parlor hall.  
Christmas, too, has closed its gate to us. . .  
"You can't go home again" to Hatley Hill.  
Last year we packed our bright and festive gifts,  
Arrived at dusk through smoky, slumbering trees  
And greeted by the waiting windows, ran  
To find him, frail but stately, arms outstretched.  
The tree was lit, the fireplace garlanded,  
The amber candles flickered on the floor.  
The turkey roasting smelled of sage and stuffing,  
Traditional Christmas dinner for us all.  
We still can see him out on Hatley Hill,  
Familiar figure in the autumn's embers  
Sitting, hushed upon a lonely bench. . .  
The oak has gone, but still the heart remembers.

ILLUSTRATION BY: ROBIN BRIDWELL

(this poem has won prizes in five poetry contests - most recently the \$125 First Prize in the Fall, 1984 Poetry Contest sponsored by THE INKLING, a magazine for poets and other writers)