**Scarce**

Pepper Trail

There was a trick you had, in the woods or in a room,

to thin yourself, lose contrast and edge,

take on the unmoving dapple of the fallen leaves,

the confused mingling of the circling crowd.

Were you still speaking? Or was that the fall

and murmur of distant water, the wind

in the tops of the tulip trees, or the sea-sound

of other voices, lapping and overlapping together?

Father, as you faded from view, did you to yourself

become more real, more alive, more awake?

Did you see more clearly, you who did not fail

to see everything that could be seen?

It was only the invisible you could not see,

strange emotions that pushed the air aside,

feelings that fell from a great height but

never reached the ground; before these helpless

things you made yourself scarce.

When the cancer came again, it was as if your body

had learned this trick too well, fell into it

with an ease indistinguishable from betrayal,

not this time a disguise but a disrobing.

Your wooden face, carved by yourself

from the finest hickory, lost its stillness

and became skin, mere skin, thin as paper,

cracking across the cheekbones, the broad nose.

Day by day, your body disappeared,

your eyes grew larger and larger,

until in the night, us two alone,

my hand upon your hot bare head,

their light filled the room, held me still,

looked through me to something else,

trying, with your great powers, to piece

together the camouflaged parts of that thing

hiding, breathing, just beyond your touch.