The Sound of a Shovel

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by Andrea Carlisle

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And then these Living leave with the chilling sound
One by one the old come, another
of them has died. They slowly approach
on trembling legs to hear empty words
fall from an appointed mouth into clear
autumn air, and to squint, through eyes
dimmed from seeing life, into the grave.

What thoughts stain the seeming blank
of these observers' minds? Do they wonder
how many kites had this one followed
in the spring wind and how many stones had he
kicked absentmindedly down how many
roads and did he really die in his sleep
or with a crippled hand moving toward
a rip of pain in his chest and will I
die the gentle death in sleep or will
I choke for air amid the children's laughter
at an outdoor bright-color church bazaar?

And then these Living leave with the chilling sound
of a shovel faint in their ears, the hush of steel
touching earth. They go to sit at spare
room windows and to watch bits of dust
caught in sun. Their hands, spotted and with
sudden twists, caress leather books
and they wonder if the Promise is true; but now,
so close and so without promise, Death
is just a black wind roaring in their minds.