

FIRST DEATH

After the first death there is no other.

-- Dylan Thomas

Mine was Jimmy Romeo in eighth grade,
whose identical twin stayed home the night
Jimmy rode our downtown streets
in the passenger seat with Frank Briggs,
also thirteen, at the wheel of his mother's car.
The two of them so bored, Frank had grabbed
his mother's keys and two six packs
from the stack by the back door
of his dull and empty house.
They'd finished two
by the time Frank reached
for another and didn't see the tree.

In school that day we'd learned
the term *deus ex machina*. I thought
it was a cheesy way to end a play
and raised my hand.
Life doesn't happen that way, I said,
wanting from the text some kind
of common sense.

No gods appeared that night
to lift Jimmy from the car
in time. Nor all those endless days
the rest of junior high and high school
as the bell shot us from our seats
into the crowded halls between classes,
sometimes passing Jimmy's twin
or—worse—stumbling into Frank—
wishing for those gods to save us.