Packing the Suitcase

Because in the end, every memory poem

is another leaving;

and stashed in its suitcase is the dusty

sum of something you once were that’s all you’re left with.

Because here’s this rag of sky that somehow you got out with—

stitched and spell-patched since into a dozen poems.

Tree-limbs and sparrows, its pink-black-golds of light. Leafing

and sifting for a phrase some bird sang who is dust.

There was a room back of it where frisks of dust

glinted in sun slants the window rinsed the bed with.

Your body turned there in a woman’s arms to poem…

May, the stubbed limbs of the poplars spun to leaves…

Naked, you rise to let the night air in. Caught in the leaves

are stars again, and street noise, and a city’s dust.

The wind’s subtle arrhythmias, as if with-

held in rushes. A café’s waft of smells. A sky of poems.

*This* poem. Gild it with spell-dust and a sift of leavings.

Your breath's, withheld in rushes, and body’s poem. Leavened dust.

First published in *Riddled with Arrows*, who I believe nominated it for a Pushcart. I really don't get how that system works, but there are a couple of nominated poems in the collection. This is a half-form sestina of the kind I call cortinas, after the first one I wrote, maybe in the 1990s. They favor the same repeating patterns as the sestina, but with a base of four rather than six. (I'm pretty sure I got the idea from one of my Creative Writing students, who found the repetitions of the full-length sestina tiresome.) I was pleased, in this one, that I managed to use all four refrain words in each of the envoi lines; it is, after all, a poem about the compressions of memory as well as its haunting repetitions. The room was in France. I'm there again now.