Camille Monet on her deathbed--after the painting by Claude Monet

by Richard Tillinghast

Camille has ventured out in a blizzard it seems.
Her husband has brushstroked her in a hurry as she
lies there dead.
What looks like a bridal veil rides up over her head,
the mouth open, showing the teeth.
The flared nostrils suggest hard breathing
just past.

Of her, what do we know other
than the smudges of pigment--
a touch of bruised scarlet in the eye of the storm
where maybe she clutched a red kerchief in her agony.
Or could someone have given her flowers to hold?

And is that her right
hand, a claw roughed in on the coverlet--
obalt blue over the ice-slick of bedclothes?

Apparition from nightmare,
a white cloth tied up under her chin
to lock her jaw shut,
her body in its dark nightdress cuts
--as in a dream I can't wake up from--
underneath the fog of her surroundings
like a tugboat transgressing through the harbor.

Richard Tillinghast is a native Tennessean. His latest book of essays is Journeys into the Mind of the World