Hello I Must Be Going

Really nice meeting you sorry
I have to hurry off there’s this thing
happening this thing I must do
you too yes dying is the thing
everyone is not talking about it
why ruin karaoke night why discolor
the air between you and the bartender
hello what can I get for you
it’s miraculous we’re here and then
the world is yanked from us and then
time dismantles our bodies to dust
okay um can I help the next customer
see it would be awkward
let’s not bring it up mum’s the word
come on now we’ve still got
some living to do pick up that trumpet
I’ve got mine already never mind
we can’t play any instruments
the point is to make a sound
any sound in this endless parade
shimmering toward silence
We're This and We're That, Aren't We?

Now that the theoretical physicist slash cosmologist has explained to me, has laid out in clean even rows of logic

how every atom in my body
arrived from a star, a star
that blasted apart,
    and the atoms of my left hand

originated from a different sun
than my right,

I can shine. I can go dark

recalling how my grandfather made
the vertical blinds rattle
when he shoved
    my grandmother into them.

Startled in the yard, I turned to that sound,
from the flowerbed my eyes were held by

the swaying blinds. It took a while for each
to line up

    perfectly straight again, to tell myself she slipped. Only then could I
return to stalking butterflies.
My right hand was quick: reach and pinch.
I had so many soft wings that summer

between my thumb and index, so many of them
skewered on cactus needles.

I was a kid. I was cruel slash gentle.
He was cruel slash gentle.
He had witnessed my destroying

and I saw

across his creased face
empathy for them.

After his scolding I placed one dead one
inside the white envelope of a flower.

Under the sun it glowed. Under the moon,
more glowing.
Depths of Despair

I can, in seconds, make my mood
descend by trying to recall

how many stents total
there are between my mother and father.

I count them off: hearts
and calves. I’ve lost track.

When I push my thinking
elsewhere—into a slower current

or brighter light—I can make my mood
lift. It cannot be done simply.

It must be—
five by now, perhaps six.

I do not remember whether
I asked my mother for the ceramic Buddha
or she gave it to me

without my asking.

Because she glazed his flesh and robe
jade green, he gleams
like a wet leaf. Underneath, she had finely etched her name, the year, then

with a thin sable brush
painted the grooves black.

Five inches tall, he squats
like a bullfrog on my lawn’s perimeter,
a spot that floods
during a downpour, slowly

a puddle will form, will lap against
his toes, his robed knees, will reach

his legendary belly, elevate him
momentarily

before he capsizes.
Facedown in grimy water
is how I find him
when the sky clears, my shoes

gasping across the spongy grass
to place him
upright. When I turn
back to the house
I see where I have been—
depressions in the soaked green.

I can sink my mood by thinking
eventually I will witness

my wife passing
or vice versa—her eyes

watching the gray light
dim from my own.

Regardless, one of us will be
followed afternoon after afternoon

by silence. Lay beside
a hollow in the mattress.

Late May, fast rain.
It rakes the patio and grass. Soon
a puddle will form, will lap against his knees.

The kitchen window is full of wobbling
beads and beads
rivering down the glass.
Daily I try to remind myself
the cosmos is always
in flux, beads wobbling and rivering beads,
that this moment is
the most recent of innumerable
cause-and-effects.

Everything
shifts. Even our speech
has evolved, continues to, each word carries
the undercurrents of Greek or Latin.

When I eliminate the signifiers—

self  wife  father  mother
comet  mattress  rain  grass

—I remember that everything is the universe,
and the beginning of language
was the beginning of separation
was the start of despair.

Only then could I imagine obliterating despair.
Hurry Up Schedule

As you walk  
    to your mammogram appointment,
I listen from inside your purse,
hear your footfalls coming  
    loud from my car’s speakers,
    I’m surround by
the machinery of you moving forward
cross town.
    I’m moving forward, too—
without speaking my odometer says 75,
and the voiceless cars along the highway say
let us hurry, let us cheat the minutes
before the minutes pick us clean.

That crunching—
    I’m guessing
you’re trekking over gravel, plateau
or piedmont gravel, creek rock
I cannot tell. Some little stones some river
worried smooth.
    If your blood was plugged
to an amplifier, blood as it races

then backtracks, it would sound like this.
And I would not sleep. I would swipe my keys,
drive nowhere under the mantra of streetlights,
the wreckage of the universe,
and wonder how
long will you be around, and how long will I be
around to witness you being around

as the speakers continue
broadcasting your steps, and I recognize this
rhythmic sound belongs to the ocean—

Bang, hiss. Bang, hiss.

Our hearts always sing it.
It's Only Vanishing Cream

In his yard, in house slippers, my father-in-law

swings on a glider bench.
It has an awning. It lays a shadow that goes
up and down his torso.

Or it’s the June sunlight
adjusting a gold blanket on his body.

It depends on how you look at it.
It depends on how you
look at this world.

There’s a sizable bruise on his arm
where the nurse couldn’t, just
couldn’t find his vein.
Midnight dark, haloed in maroon.

Listen: Twice he evaded death. Or twice
it evaded him.

It depends. And what connotations
a word holds. How death could lower
a mind’s temperature, dim its glow.

Let us call it vanishing cream instead.
Twice, in two separate seasons, a jar of vanishing cream appeared in his hospital room. Some invisible hand about to unscrew the airtight lid. It wavered, second-guessing, unsure if now was a good time.

Now, June sunlight cranks the contrast on the awning’s blue fabric, razzle-dazzles his entire yard, the pastel blooms in the flowerbed where a hummingbird flits across the length of it, her long, long beak gleaming like a needle.