

# 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





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

for Aaron Glatt

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.