

JAN WESLEY

*My Old Man Gets Sick and Dies and
Leaves This Hole in the Universe*

1.

He still drives around
the neighborhood, voice the texture
of hammered rocks, humming to KJAZ. Crazy

how a car might pull up to a light, a ridge of grey
hair lying low along an unkempt collar,
copycat image making me

double-take, double-take,

but it's not him. And it's not
that guy moving at a snail's pace, black
beret cocked to one side as he watches closely

for that nick in the sidewalk that might send him
flying. And it's not the guy at the counter
rubbing a ten-dollar bill

with a scratchy crackle,
making certain a fiver isn't attached
to it. I feel the pain of his death for an hour, not

excessive considering 15 years in Pennsylvania, then
35 of that breezy California lifestyle where
I labored through years of lost

concentration, ingesting
an impressive index of chemicals, stunned
and carefree like dad on morphine before his body stopped.

2.

After the quiet I feel the box of his Pacemaker, slip off
his watch, wriggle the bent finger till it's free
of its gold band, my hands

cupping his freezing face.

Imperceptible like time moving (or not)
my arms go to where a rib is still cracked, the final unhealing

bone, and no matter how long I sit, ear to his chest, there is
no heft of air in or out as his face loses tension, no
worries anymore, 3:40 pm, December 14th.

3.

Last night's sleep was kinder
than ether, dulling a trepidation I might lose
sight of the final dropped guard of his dignity—weakened knees,

spine grouted with pain—insistent as I was for him to take pill
after pill *for the pain, dad*, since he couldn't quite
think of them as a miracle. I am selfish,

unprepared for him to disappear,
our daily rants ripped away like sheet from person
needing to be identified and I'd give him carte blanche to pound

more sense into my ailing lack of it if only he could've stuck
around. By January I visit the city he grew up
in, New York's light

invasive as I walk around
the biggest hole in the earth, so deep & depressed
I balance my weight on a crate at the end of a taped-off street

gazing down at metal cranes and tangled cement to see what
will replace the Towers—the twisted rebar, ghostly
ash—until security tells me to move.

4.

I figure I'll polish off
that image of his trembling hands
and teeth the morning he died, so I drink at the Algonquin,

with priceless rugs, plush seats, every marble table surrounded
by suited business pros propped up by privilege.
My father coveted none of the above

but liked photos plastered edge
to edge along the walls around his desk—the ones
of sisters and brides and cousins and Einstein and V.I. Lenin

who led a revolution the year my father was born. Three months
from now I imagine my mother will have to
take the photos down and we will drive

around the neighborhood
hearing shopkeepers notice his absence,
asking after him as people do from porches where dad sipped

vodka, wanting to be like any guy you never see until
he's gone, the lack of him tumbling off the stoop
into your unsuspecting lap.