

**Dear Gravity,**

Let's say we begin and end with questions, and putting aside  
for now those associated with being born: my father  
in his bed is a wrinkle among thin blankets. His breath  
an engine turning over. His arms go up sometimes  
in his ungentle sleep as if to protect the eggshell of his skull,  
as if he is hiding under the desk of the world  
and the sirens have begun to blare. Dear Gravity,  
I cannot say he doesn't float, despite this heaviness.  
He drifts in a half sleep, speaks  
in a half tongue; such dreaming only the dying can do.  
The meat he asks back to his bare bones  
won't come from soup or cups of pudding  
cajoled into the red gap of his open mouth, which has gone loose  
as a broken hinge. *One one one more only, this*  
*the very last*, the nurse says, spoon tilted, her own hips straight  
and solid, someone so planted in the world  
it would take a violence to uproot her. My father  
both sinks and soars in his dry, thin paper skin.  
His lips are red and dark and rough;  
despite such poverty of moisture, they demark  
the entrance to the watery cave of the body. The lexicon of questions  
is poor in relation to that vast tunnel,  
the red and slightly pulsing tunnel beyond the ivory markers  
of his rotted porcelain teeth. Where  
in that disintegrating labyrinth  
is the him that *is*? Not the lights that flash  
and blink on the body's dashboard, not  
the automatic systems that stutter along  
until they don't. Not even the voice  
that sometimes booms out orders  
surprising the muddle of confounded mutters,  
the litany of small refusals whispered hoarsely  
in the direction of the lamp's plastic-wrapped shade.  
What is left, Gravity, after the body has been turned to ashes  
and after his imprint and stink  
have been replaced by someone else's and after,  
even, the words have been spoken among  
friends and family and the catered panini cleared finally away,  
after the urn has been placed on a mantel,  
where will he be? Not anywhere  
anyone's hand can reach for his own,  
which rests yet on the blanket  
and through which runs a live blue vein like a mountain range at dusk  
seen from very far above.