Elegy Begun in July

1.
Come back says my father
to the ruby-throated
hummingbird studying

the dahlias on the deck
where we drink our coffee.
In the house his wife says

something to her hospice nurse
that makes them both laugh.
This moment has little

market value until you add up
the cost of red nectar
and dahlias my father bought

to battle the reluctance
of hummingbirds.
Come back. His voice pebbles

with exasperation.
The grammar of his grief
is full of false imperatives.

2.
The dying have fewer rules
than the dead, breath
anchoring in their chests

as the rest of the body
grows lonely for oxygen
like landscapes grow lonely

for shadows on overcast
days. The dying have
sharper eyes than I expected,
gaze of circling hawks,
all hunger without
burden of intellect.
3. 

*Lucid* means *clear,* 
as if the dying 
are less transparent, 

and maybe they are. 
Maybe when we forget 
ourselves our bodies fill 

with clouds. What I mean 
to say is I’m afraid 
of the dying—who might 

say anything at all— 
though not of the dead. 
I will sit with a body 

whenever I’m needed, 
but if the dying 
want to talk, I’m mute 

as the row of boulders 
my father planted 
under the hackberries, 

a spine to keep 
the weeds in place.