

TRAVIS MOSSOTTI
About the Living

The Dublin pitch-drop experiment was set up in 1944 at Trinity College Dublin to demonstrate the high viscosity or low fluidity of pitch—also known as bitumen or asphalt—a material that appears to be solid at room temperature, but is in fact flowing, albeit extremely slowly.

—Richard Johnston, from the journal *Nature*

Not that the man waving me slowly
into the single lane or the men
behind him laying asphalt
in the doldrums of August are aware,
but the world's longest running
science experiment has ended
just as it was predicted to end,
which proved what was already known:
the road upon which I drive only appears
to be solid, is in fact an artery
or minor capillary of bitumen oozing
me home from work against the flow
of the funeral procession approaching
from the opposite direction.

I've heard hearse drivers in Missouri
earn an average of ten dollars an hour,
which is difficult to live on, even here,
but is still a job with a purpose as clear
as the ozone-stripped sky,
and as the driver passes me with his train
of mourners in tow, we briefly
make eye contact, and he nods
in my direction as if to say,
the only thing we can possibly say
to one another in such circumstances:
You exist, I acknowledge this much.
In the rearview, I see the procession
as they are given priority through
the work zone and see the workers
who break and turn to watch it pass.

But there's one man who keeps on after
the others have turned back to work,
thinking perhaps about the living
who follow so closely behind
the dead to the cemetery
that will absorb the body
into its rapture of worms.
And even though
he'll probably have forgotten
this moment by the end of the day,
right now he stands there alone
against a river of molten tar
like the gnomon on a sundial
refusing to cast its shadow.