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Things Dying & Where

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It seems my father has been old
an awfully long time. It’s likely
he will die that way. *Funny grapes,*
he calls the Minnehaha choke-
cherry, cuffing the bunch. *Ity bitty.*

What a bear-weird shape, my father
in the hale grey of this place. Eyes
souped & wild. He smells of a tired
mustard. Everything seems ready
to take him: the lichen, the falls,
the hungry earth. When he trips
I don’t catch him because I am small, I say,
or because he is darkened & peltlike,
nape loose as a great-backed animal
& gravied with sweat. The late
bloom of him.

*Oop,* he says.
*Sorry, honey,* & stands, brushing the veinless
space under his knee. My father’s lessening
is a strange harvest: each fingertip
a skulk of borzoi, his nose a waxy
Spanish lamppost, his eyes ink-pewter
& baby’s dough. When he falls
I don’t catch him,

his fiddled-with heart
already the rhododendron root ball.