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The old Volkswagen screams

STOP CHECK ENGINE

but like my father I keep driving, hope
the problem goes away—a method

best suited to computer glitches,
stomach issues and failing

marriages. My phone beams
info to the clouds. Soon even my car

won't need me. My 898 friends
puts me just ahead of the neighbor's sulky kid,

but way ahead of Jesus so whatever. His pennilessness
made my father's death a government

affair. Stony bureaucrats and shoeboxes
stuffed with official-looking letters.

When I called the nursing home to ask about his bill
I said, *My father passed away there last week.*

Mmm-hmm? the woman answered. Must be the smell
of antiseptic and low pay. Must be the crumbling empire.

This country has become
a vast conveyer designed to feed us so slowly

into the furnace we forget it burns. I hunch over
a grocery cart in my white skin, enduring

eye-rolls from the checker, feeling smug
about my garlic heads and cabbages, twiggy cereals

and pastoral chicken. Man when I was twenty-one
I had it figured. The Clinton years.

Now I galumph around like a big dumb puppy,
sniff for biscuits, show my belly

to the legislature. I want to live
at the end of a road so steep only a fool

would brave it. A human desire for high vantages, vistas,
a mixture of safety and grandeur.

Why in the Midwest we nod
but do not say hello.

Also, *l'appel du vide*—the urge to outfly
the circling ravens. The funeral home director

handed me Dad's ashes in a sturdy paper bag
the weight of a few soup cans.

I put him in the trunk and drove
to my sister's house, wishing he could see

me in my new suit. I swear
the trees were trying to tell me something,

scrawling their names on the winter sky—

SUGAR MAPLE DEAD PINE

Oh, and (thanks, Dad) the plan is working fine.
The check engine light went off.

Now I'm back to less definite signals:
my neighbor pulling siding from his house,

the sandhill cranes like a terrible engine
turning over, a woman wheeling

her oxygen tank across the parking lot.
Must be the poisoned air,

fumes from fracked seams, the screams
of bees swarming an enemy.

Another janitor mopping blood.
A sky so gray you hardly see the flames.