

SMILING BACK

I meet my father for breakfast.  
He dwells in some life after  
Alzheimer's, yet smiles: *Are you still  
my daughter?* The first sick joke  
from the afterlife begins on the phone.  
I admit, regrettably, that I am. His skull

knobs out; I can imagine the skin  
the color of a car's undercarriage, the sun  
catching the mica flecks in his eyes.  
His thoughts float on the surface, torn  
out of context. He's dying, he says:  
ninety-two and a ragpile wreck.

He throws down the paper.  
*Still all assholes!* he proclaims and asks  
the word for forgetfulness.  
I remind him: CRS syndrome:  
Can't Remember Shit. His favorite joke  
lives on in my memory. I leave him  
in his black leather chair, feeling  
the question pelting my back.

*Still your daughter,*  
I say on the phone from the airport.  
Now I'm on a plane and as far  
as he's concerned, I might as well be  
in the afterlife. But I'm just mulching him  
over, planting him, sure that whatever  
comes up is him, an irrepressible weed.