

J.D. Smith

To the Departed

Goddammit, Dad, you had to go and die
Just when your lessons finally took with me —
Solvent and saving, married, largely dry
With plenty more on tap for you to see.
But no. Like Francis Albert sang, you went
And did it your way, turning chemo down
To let rogue cells command your lungs' descent
Into a fullness where you'd rather drown
Than clutch at further wasting, months made up
Of waiting room and ward and CT scan
In strangers' care. You took a different cup
And left me sooner on my own to plan
How I might answer when the Reaper calls.
We'll see if I've inherited your balls.

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The New Normal

The telephone has never been our friend,
But now we merely dread a stranger's bid
To get our cash or votes or souls or, rarely, lend.
The call that comes just once already did.
The good donated, parceled out or trashed,
The house went off the market in five days.
Two cars changed title, life insurance cashed.
The rest was split in uncontested ways.
The question mark now scratched off future dates,
Our sentences don't trail off with *unless* . . .
A calm unknown for years illuminates
The routine hours afforded with largesse
To survey what we have, not what we lack.
In any case, Dad isn't coming back.

Features of a Late Style

Now shorn the ornaments and digressions, flags
Planted to claim new countries for the self,
And disappeared the filigrees that would elaborate
Unending tendrils into every vacant space.

Instead of them, and sparely, come wide arcs,
Discerned from distant mists and mountaintops,
Insinuating realms entire to chart
And occupy the minds of generations.

Suggestion stands in for totality
As there is time for this, and nothing else.