

After Last Decisions

For three years, whenever he messed himself,
like an obedient child, he rolled on his side away from her,

thin hipbone and shrunken buttocks gleaming,

unflinching as she wiped and washed him,
and when he didn't wake to ask for the bedpan,

she woke to the smell of urine
which carried out the night and carried in

the bleached blank abandonment of day.

Cancer ate at his spine, yet she, too, as if minnows worked thousands
of small cold mouths against her flesh, was devoured.

How to account for a sweet nature, his to the end?
Or how his silence before the world's stern reductions,

his humor even in pain, moved her with a force she could not
explain, love deepening, and that love, no minor recompense.

Yet how brown and dank and illimitable her exhaustion is.

Does she have shoulders, breasts, a face? Anything to touch
below her waist? Is she the one dead?

Everything smells of rot, his sheets, pillow, even his false teeth.

A woman who is salvage, who is picked clean, places his clothes and shoes in plastic bags and heaves them into the cavity of charity's white dumpster.

What meadow can she wake in with desire restored?

What manna can feed such hollowness?