

John Repp

NO AWAY

Grandfather retching in the parlor
where the hospice nurse hovers,
grandmother in a drugged sleep
in the back bedroom, frazzled mother
having said *Just go away*
the child wails *But there is*
no away! — that moment
myth now, decades on, myth
not mine, though when the tale

got told, I wept, vowing to bring
that shell to my ear whenever rage
& self-pity ebb, or when my son
asks why this dinosaur ate meat
& that one flew & why they're dead
& *What's a comet, Papa?*
Ice & rocks flying through space.
How's ice get up there?
It's very cold in space.

Is a comet coming now?
which tells me to change
the subject because I've just
finished reading about surgeons
manipulating microscopic scalpels
inside torsos a New Jersey
entrepreneur schlepped via
picnic cooler & van, then thawed
in his suite for two days so the flesh

would feel authentic. *You don't think about who they were because now they're meat* says a homicide cop who sounds like a Zen master toward whom I feel intermittent devotion. Her *You are not this bag of skin* has me staring at the asymmetrical mole inside my right elbow.

I love that elbow. I kiss my son's elbow, his toes, his Art Tatum fingers. I kiss his mother everywhere as often as possible & you know where this will end, don't you? You can predict the very words that will end this few

minutes with me, can't you? Even though everything I write reeks of what a category-loving friend calls "late Romanticism," I am here to reflexively tell you that I *am* here on an actual day in Erie, Pennsylvania, sitting at a black table in Barnes & Noble, half-watching hundreds of cars

roar by, rare, early-spring sunlight blaring through the mesh curtains, a medical student pondering bone pathology ten feet to my left, unaware I'm fighting not to end this. This is no fooling. I've got beloveds I want immortal (in fact, I told my shrink *immortality* this morning when she asked what I most wanted),

though the wry tone I can't help but use shouldn't fool you into thinking I don't know the void my son's outer-space book makes gorgeous isn't. Inside this precious, irrelevant pouch of flesh, I talk to you now, right now, both of us every moment at the end, where there *is* no away & never has been, never.