

## What Happens Is Neither the End

nor the beginning, my Zen teacher said.  
But we're wired to look for signs. Consider  
the rose bushes. One makes a perfect bud  
after months of nothing. Another's leaves  
are ringed with black rot. How can I not  
think, *end*. How can I not say, *beginning*.

Leaves fall when the days shorten  
because a tree must reduce  
to its tough parts—twig, branch,  
bark. My mother sleeps away  
the daylight. She nods off while  
chewing a spoonful of rice and fish,  
her head a peony gone to seed.

My father calls to say she doesn't  
recognize him anymore. Turning  
to him last night she cried out,  
certain a stranger was in her bed.  
He played his violin till she slept—  
a leaf in late fall, curling into itself.  
Her neck bent, a tender stem.

In autumn, chlorophyll disappears  
from leaves, cancelling the green  
so yellow and magenta can blaze.  
In my mirror I see her—the smile  
that favors one cheek, eyes slanting  
in the shape of small fish  
we used to eat for breakfast.

Trees know best the *now*-ness of things.  
What goes on has been going on  
for centuries. Rinsing dishes, I rest  
one foot on my standing leg. A fork  
clangs on the tile. I rinse a cup.  
I try not to think of endings.