Plywood & Ashes

[redacted]

I. Disposal
Three bags of clothes,
six boxes of books
and two plants.
Useful things,
already gone,
sold.
The rest:
old-man shirts,
creased trousers,
paperbacks with split spines:
The Art of Stillness,
Your Life in Your Hands,
Loving What Is,
Mind Power into the 21st Century,
The Prostate Problem.
You lift a box,
as she watches on.
Thanks for helping.
“Keep this one?”
The school yearbook.
“Hell no.”
You carry her father
downstairs
in instalments.
One load at a time.

II. Division
The apartment,
the furniture,
the paintings,
the silver cutlery set
and wedding china.
The good jewellery,
“left by my mother,”
wedding china, of course,
the expensive watch,
money in the bank,
and the car.
Four equal shares
of whatever remains.
Two girls, two boys.
This daughter became
the personal shopper.
Assets.
Capital gain.
Fees.
Following you outside

“That bitch should get nothing,
she was never here.”
You close the boot.
Meet you there?

III. Packaging
The coffin is cheap,
deliberately cheap.
Blue velvet hangs
over,
hiding plywood.
On top:
Bruce at forty-something,
suited,
shaven,
upright,
before the shirts,
the books,
the boxes.
The funeral director,
kitted up.
An expensive watch,
hair shining,
a light drizzle outside,
The Pearl Fishers Duet
playing low.
You will have oak.
The finest available.
Never mind the fire.
“My money to waste.”

IV. Procession
Twenty minutes,
a good father,
a wonderful businessman.
A faithful husband,
then widowed.
Together again.
Fishing.
Childhood.
Thank you for coming.
Let’s keep it quick.
Some watch online.
Then the trolley moves,
the velvet slips,
catching in the wheel,
tightening,
falling.
For a moment
Bruce will go no further.
Plywood exposed.

They reverse him,
lift the cloth,
smooth it down.
Try again.
At the hearse,
he disappears inside.
No one's to follow.
The crematorium
can manage the rest.
Someone mentions drinks.
"I'm gasping," she says.

V. Celebration
What'll you have?
Red wine.
Margarita.
Craft beer.
Cognac.
To Bruce.
To Bruce.
Then:
who stayed,
who left,
who visited,
who didn't,
who married badly,
who took whose side,
who cared more,
who deserves what.
A chair scrapes.
A voice rises.
A hand strikes the table.
Glass hits slate.
everything
small and breakable
is underfoot.
Somewhere else,
The plywood catches.

VI. Remains
You leave.
Thank goodness
it's over.
She calmed down,
eventually.
Following you
through the bar.
Clear instructions:
dump the lot.
"Thanks for coming."
The car is full of him.

Open door,
the air moves.
Dust lifts
from the seats,
from paper,
from cloth,
all unwanted.
Sitting at the wheel
Bruce packed
around you.
For a second
it tastes
like ash,
then catches in
your throat.
You breathe it in
anyway.

END.