

# Subtraction

Meredith Hall

My father weighed 144 pounds—all his life, he bragged—  
losing height from 6 feet 0 inches to not much taller  
than me (5 feet 4) by the time he died at 95,  
but still 144 pounds,

a graceful man, hung together loosely with muscle  
and sinew, up and down the ladder to his loft  
to paint and read and nap and dream  
and prepare, I'm sure, for the end, although

I cannot know for sure just how we get ready for this—

and I prepared, too, imagining the silence that would come  
at his end of the house, getting ready for that one morning  
when his stretched out form under the weight of 5 wool blankets  
and the old afghan would not jolt back to this world at my voice,

or for that warm spring day when I would suddenly know  
he had been too long reading in his garden chair—  
me trying to get ready—  
and sometimes we both were scared,

his pulse up from that clockwork 60 to a ragged 83,  
or times when he needed me to count out his children, 1, 2, 3, 4.  
He died 106 days ago. His ashes weigh 7 pounds,

a reduction of nearly 95% and all the rest—137 pounds—  
smoke rising on a clear May day.