

What Death Is

When my father says, *you must get used to the fact that I'm going to die*, I'm surprised that he doesn't know that Mom's breath became what I learned was "absence"—when the tears fell from his eyes like pinpricks of stars that collapsed against her blue-ing arms—I've known what death is. I've known death since my sister cupped her hands over my eyes and pressed me away from the gurney into our living room when my father tried to kill himself. His body was hauled out after we found the empty bottle of pills that I didn't have a name for. My father locked his door and left a note while I studied the haftarah at Temple Kol Ami. I know that you would let yourself die, from pneumonia, from the coronavirus, from the pain of living without your wife. I heard it yesterday, in your voice, when your breath sounded like the shaken cup of stones that we pick the best of and lay on Mom's grave. The wheel of amber reminds me of when we buried a family of ducklings on the beach. The lifeless bodies had yellow tips of moonlight attached to their wings. I wish that I didn't know what it's like to know that you will someday die. That you will be pressed into the earth, covered with a fistful of soil while I stand over you and say, *May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us.*