

SELECTED POEMS

CHRIS BURSK

Ashes, Ashes, We All Fall Down

If I'm going to be ashes in a decade or so,
why stay up past midnight staring at the television
as if it might have a change of heart
and put a third-party candidate in office for once
or end the war, and, while it was at it, clear up my grandson's acne?
Maybe I should just enjoy the dog's howling next door.
All night it's been tugging at its chain
as if the links might finally get bored with being metal and snap.

If I'm going to be incinerated — burnt to a crisp —
in roughly 3,650 days, why am I sulking
because this morning of all mornings my car tired of doing
the same thing it had done the morning before,
and because half my class chose not to show up for a lecture that
I, their professor, a year from retirement, had hoped
would change their entire outlook
on comma splices? Once I'm ashes drifting away on the water,

what will it matter that years ago I threw up on my senior-prom date,
or last week forgot my wife's sixty-first birthday,
or this morning embarrassed my grandson in front of his friends?
How do any of us prepare for the future
when we're so busy making a mess
of the present? Perhaps this is time's truest revenge:
to make us aware of its passing, every minute
of every day. Approximately 5,256,000 minutes

from now — give or take a month or year or two —
my son is going to stand on a bridge
with his children and do something he never thought
he'd have to do: let his quirky,
annoying, yet lovable (I'd hoped!) father slip through his fingers.
That's my only comfort: I will be ashes
so fine they won't even question the rocks
they fall on, the creek that sweeps them away.

For once I'll not embarrass anyone.
For once I'll not have to worry
about whether I'm doing something right.
I'll perform the one miracle of my life.