

Black Hole

... every system collapses.

—Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, 27 April 1978

The day they photographed the black
hole, the light passing the event horizon
before disappearing into nothing-
ness, we knew then the center of something
only by its edge, the outline projecting what
it could of middle ground, the eye burning
through radio waves onto our screens:
We had never questioned our mortality
in ways that mattered: we did not understand
the foolishness of time until we saw the gaping
mouth of infinity. You were dying
in another place in another
year, and the boundaries of our known
world collapsed then: everything became
small: our loop to the clinic, the pharmacy,
the health food store: vitamins in little cups
stacked on your nightstand, celery I'd wash
twice before putting in the blender, feeling
the base of each stalk for the line of dirt

I knew I'd find there. Above me — around
me — matter folded in on itself in absolute
darkness. I don't know why we assumed
that we could live uninterrupted, unaffected;
if light itself is not guaranteed, nothing
is guaranteed. I made your bed, I moved
your cane, my thoughts not of death
but of aftermath, a question for science
at its core: in the space of absence, what
abides? If the beam of the camera
can tip over the edge, passing without
fanfare into what we cannot see, how can
we expect to carry on our lives—shopping
for groceries, pulling dandelions from flower
beds, washing sheets on Wednesdays—
while the afternoon sun passes over
your sleeping form on the couch in the front
study for now, knowing you'll be
gone with the same small tug: every flower
and leaf bending toward a center
that I cannot see.