

## “the man who couldn’t face death”

The man who couldn’t face death  
You laugh; I wince.  
I glimpse a moment of my naïveté.  
Expectations of profound wisdom – perhaps foolish.  
Why I wonder, is death scary  
or just barely thought about?  
You say you ignore it. Do I?  
Should I?  
We talk of catheters, pianos. Of wheelchairs  
and where’s your sanity these days.  
You laugh again.

A glass of water comes in and leaves him a smile.  
Her old jewellery-making table sits in the corner.  
She doesn’t use it much these days you tell me  
it’s a shame  
I nod.

New conversation, what did you do  
education and music:  
onto the music now,  
neurons on fingers on keys. But  
not in this household any more, you tell me,  
I haven’t played the piano in years.  
Head in the sand, you say.

Do I fear it? Not death:  
Decline  
Your wheelchair reclines, we laugh.  
Can’t waste time thinking about it.  
Back to music, you’re losing choir  
but the fire still burns inside,  
it’s your body getting caught in the rain.

The stain of a losing battle on your face  
a race to fill the remaining days  
but never a rush.  
A hush in the room again  
we look at the rain now seen  
on windows and skin.

So thin you are but not in knowledge  
for I see a breadth of wisdom in those  
quivering hands of yours, hands  
which have done their time trying to  
find the right keys.

So we come to the end and you ask me  
just once to play – only if I want to.  
But of course I say, though  
I haven’t played the piano in years.