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Mr. Death

If I were to draw
back then
right now
it would be a book
of crude black and white
cartoons of skeletons
and narrow faces

little stick figures
scurrying about
smoking cigarettes
eating canapés
making airline reservations.

My father vital
bridling with energy
cleaning his briar pipe.
My mother walking slowly
beautiful in yellow cotton
and sad.

My brother, distant
oiling his catcher’s mitt.
I, in kinetic poses
rushing from cookie jar
to Dragnet to Danger Man
to Captain Kangaroo how I hated you.

At their funerals
back then
death
was invisible
immutable
I called it Mr. Death.

He lurked
like a mold, a virus
a recurring weather system
an unseen moon
a dark comic book hero

(continued)

speaking backwards
counting down
to zero.