

Cremation

Billy Collins

It's half the binary of fire or earth,
but the question of where one's ashes
will go has many more answers than two.

Scattering is the option *du jour*,
maybe over a favorite body of water—
a lake where she learned to fish,
an ocean he liked to stare into toward the end.

Others pick multiple locations—
a ballpark, a backyard,
a rose garden, and the roof of a gym.
And guess who's not here to divide
the nearly weightless powder into equal parts?

Shake your heads, but bear in mind
that without a wish
you could end up in a coffee can
on a high shelf, your widow glancing up—
but not frequently enough—from an armchair.

I've always thought "hither and thither"
would make things easy on my survivors,
who would dither, then laughing toss
handfuls of me from a speeding convertible.

But wouldn't the easiest spot of all be
the nearby fireplace or Franklin stove,
where I, who enjoyed walking
amid the yellow-green trees of spring
or the bare, crisscross branches of winter,
would at last be indistinguishable
from the cinders of the maple,
the mighty oak, and even the pale mountain ash.

Now, I'm not sure how you heard it,
but in my version, Bob Hope's wife
asked her husband on his deathbed
whether he wanted to be buried or cremated.
"Surprise me," replied the comic before expiring.