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This thesis asks questions of God and grapples with our limitations both mental and physical. It catalogs difficult moments, strange observations, and contends with how the world might end. That said, I hope it isn't too much of a downer.

ANY AMOUNT OF DECAY

by

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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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## **At the End**

The earth crumbles.  
A hand waves from the dirt,  
says that we've been buried alive,  
that the fear is real.

The earth begins to float into space.  
The pop music we sent out—  
all of that electromagnetic radiation  
is coalescing, bouncing randomly,  
and like a loudspeaker the earth  
is spitting Katy Perry and scaring away  
extra-terrestrials who generally just call themselves  
Terrestrials. Or here: Extra Terrestrial Americans.

A split in the milky way caused the  
tectonic rupture, sped up from one ice age  
to another and left us perfectly preserved:  
a wax museum full of people having sex  
and lying. One or two: delivering the mail.

The earth was cross-sectioned  
and exhibition or no  
part and parcel became art.  
At any moment, you could be doing  
what you're doing for the rest of the life  
of the universe. Floating incandescent  
for nobody to find. Would you care then,  
that you weren't wearing any pants?

If a tree falls in the woods  
but hits absolute zero before it lands  
the molecules stop moving—  
it's the ultimate death—  
nothing is recycled. The atoms do not  
disintegrate, the cells do not senesce.  
Everything is simultaneously alive and dead—

a stoppage of time to be proud of.  
A slow incalculable move  
toward nothingness that strikes  
when you most expect it.



When everything is the least peaceful  
and the earth finally groans: *enough*.

This is what God would do if there were God.

When the earth crumbles,  
If another us, somewhere, can see it,  
they will say that this is how it happens  
to others. They will stare from their  
telescopes and rejoice that it isn't them,  
not their earth, not yet.

I

## Stress Dream of Perfectly Executed Medical School Interview

The interviewer loves my 1970s flared suit—  
it's blue and the belt buckle is fist sized because  
I shopped online and got confused.

We sit and he asks me why I want to be a doctor  
and I scream until my voice cracks.  
He nods thoughtfully and checks a little box.

He pulls out a cigarette and tells me he has lung cancer,  
and then asks me to break the news to him.  
I tell them that I have it on good authority that he's going to die  
soon, and he checks another box.

We eat a beet salad for lunch, a whole bowl of beets,  
and where are the other premeds?  
It's just me and him and beet blood soaking into my suit.

I tell him I'm so scared, so scared  
I'm not going to make it  
through medical school,

what with the suicide rates so high.

He pulls out a copy of the DSM 5  
and says that fear of death is a job requirement,

and then lights me on fire. *See how long  
you can walk around while you're burning  
inside.* He watches while I claw at my skin.  
*You're used to it, you'll be fine.*

## **On Living**

Because everything that can grow grows  
and everything that can live lives  
every day battles between the reed and the cement,  
the dog and the sewer rat risen to find  
bread crumbs are monumental struggles  
unseen by upright walkers,  
by uninterested observers of God's Plan  
who themselves linger at the bus stop  
imagining how it would feel to be  
run over in their best suit and tie,  
at the intersection of darkening sky  
and their favorite fruit stand.

The towering department stores,  
those corporation-people, use the people-people  
to greet and draw in the cash flow of customers—  
more uprights imagining their own  
untimely deaths, trying to live between dress racks  
and dusk rays, trying to see the ant that fights the shoe  
as something Godly, and here we are again,  
the stretch of sidewalk pawing at the broken pavement,  
the shoe laces decrepit and decaying fighting  
the dog urine for that small corner of uncorrupted sidewalk,  
the raw skin of a razor-burned chin pulling itself together  
amid a battle royale of bacterial infection—  
this living is such a brutal thing. But it can't be helped.

### **For the Man Carrying the Plant on 3rd Avenue**

You are the kind of father  
I hope that I will be some day  
because sometimes mothers  
are fathers as well.

You carry your plant and I think  
of Will, whose plant is named Josito,  
who rotates it 45 degrees every evening,  
who will be a mother, because  
sometimes fathers are mothers  
as well, and the tenderness with which  
he looks at leaves and tends to flowers  
and the way in which you hug that plant  
close to your chest in traffic wrapping  
it in bicep, stem resting on neck, is  
so lovely—you who has places to be  
with said plant and yet like a parent  
shoulder it anyway.

You are the sort of stranger I would like to be,  
un-shy of eye contact, unafraid of seeding  
thoughts like these in the minds of children,  
because sometimes parents are children  
as well, grateful for the oddity of a five-foot  
tall plant hoisted toward rain.

## Volunteering for Medical School

Rags in basins  
of hot soapy water pushed  
across exposed stomach  
and breast, beached-whale  
white and unaware except  
for the reverberating  
sensation of being violated.  
That's how I imagined it feels  
when they scream—  
*Stop, you're hurting me!*  
*It's so cold! Please!* As the nurse  
cleans nails, teeth, vagina,  
replies in soothing tones  
*We'll be done soon, Mrs. Jones,*  
*almost done.* And I have the other  
wash cloth and am obedient  
and empty basins and replace  
linens and spoon food  
into mouths at lunch time  
and sit in silence, told  
that I am to wait for the death rattle  
and then notify someone  
to take the body away.  
I come in once a week  
and work a four-hour shift.  
Most weeks the patients I  
cared for the week before  
are dead. Sometimes the families  
come and are looking to be angry  
at someone. I like to be yelled  
and glared at. I feel most helpful,  
then. Normally, I sit and feel nothing,  
until the nurse who works the twelve-hour  
shifts back to back tells me she  
can't afford a birthday present  
for her child. Then I cry on the  
twenty-minute drive home.

## **Radium**

Mina Loy wrote  
Curie as a sculptor,  
discoverer of elemental  
worth, a martyr  
for the parts of the earth  
laying dormant and  
unadorned.

Stein wrote Curie  
simply as subject,  
contemporary.  
Curie was interested  
in the discovery,  
Stein in the naming—  
in context lies content,  
it is the only real sort  
of objectivity.

I write about Loy  
writing about Stein  
writing about Curie  
to say that I am Jewish, too.  
To say that Marie Curie  
was not. But then—

radium. The sacrifice,  
the suffering all  
to pursue discovery,  
every value of The Tribe  
inscribed in the skin  
that sloughed off  
inking words into  
a white chalky  
exterior that vanishes  
on contact with air  
to reveal black nitride  
irreverent inside—

Curie is a metaphor  
for the Jew who wanders  
too far from home

and finds herself  
in the enemy encampment  
with all of the answers.

A Jew's favorite heroine.  
The kind that doesn't survive.



## The Things We Are Afraid Of

My mother sends me emails about the dangers of:

- sharks
- trampolines
- a lunatic in an adjacent state
- medical school acceptance rates
- Uber drivers
- my grandmother
- living alone
- low cell phone battery
- airplanes
- Donald Trump
- other sharks
- Lyft drivers
- walking while female

and more. One day she tells me a colleague of hers woke up to find photos taken by her phone and sent elsewhere—a hacked camera in a dark hotel room.

*So weird*, she says. But that's all. No speeches on the loss of agency, on the things we cannot control.

## On the Senate Floor

A semicolon acts as a ceasefire,  
separating sides  
but demonstrating the fluidity  
of the trenches and a colon  
comes in with the right example  
but the em dash cuts the colon off  
and back to bickering,  
the halves must eventually be stalled  
by a period. When the fighting  
restarts at the capital  
there is no place  
for the comma to go,  
no one is breathing between words  
just screaming with  
*bang* exclamation points at *bang*  
frequent intervals until a quiet question mark  
unravels the debate:

Why are the sides so separate anyway?

A caesura ripples through the crowd.  
The ideological differences are not  
laid down but hoisted higher,  
a paragraph breaks free  
and then another—  
argument, counter-argument,  
to columns now, an assortment of fonts,  
someone even jumps into the superscript  
threatening to fall but the baseline  
shifts to catch them and all of this  
is unstoppable, enjambed,  
flowing freely from line to line,  
idiom to adage, the symbolism back-bent  
into weather-worn phrasing trapped  
in razor-thin margins—  
it is a familiar distortion that makes it  
illegible to the people, meaningless  
to the politicians, the language of  
those that don't look  
too closely, place their quotes in blocks  
and avoid the intrusion  
of new thought.

## Plans

On a blind date  
with a book  
I discover a mother  
who scrubs day and night  
a rickety boarding house to rid it  
of my eyes. I can feel

the splintering floor  
and apologize because I can't  
look away.  
She can't pay for  
their food and I offer to help,  
skipping ahead to the lives  
of her children  
when there is plenty to eat  
and the war is  
not on.

Together we rebuild  
this house; I provide direction,  
my eyes shift to next steps  
while she grunts  
and sways in the wind.  
We build this house  
without diagram or blueprint  
or men.  
She nods to me  
near the back cover  
for sharing  
this moment and her entire life  
is gone, when I move  
us ahead just thirty pages.

Her eyes were  
so lovely and brown—  
I can see them when I sleep.

## **My Only Secret**

I think it's the only secret  
I've ever really kept. Told no one.  
Maybe it's that  
you found her and I found you  
after school where my old hound  
used to chase your chickens where  
your too-high fence kept him and  
onlookers out where your mother  
almost died  
but didn't, white cone  
shaping her figure as she  
told my mother that she fell.  
A decade ago now,  
the only thing I never told  
anyone and it's yours,  
not mine. Maybe that's why  
I think of her and the grave and  
wonder if I'd tried a little harder  
if she'd tried a little harder  
if we'd find each other  
carrying secrets in coffins,  
apologies to the names  
that would miss us, waking up  
in cold coffee sweats with only  
the company of animals;

when your mother jumped from  
the roof did she see the flightless  
birds below her and know it  
was her only chance to—

## Honest Lies

*For Mike*

I believe only in honest lies—  
when the flowers think it's time because  
the sun slunk late because the moats of plastic  
peeled its outer layer away and it peeked out,  
punctured evening with afternoon,  
I believed that they didn't know  
spring would still blue them bloated  
wilted writhing in slow-motion like  
you on the table, you who asked for  
Aspirin, you who thought your heart  
attack was indigestion your reverse-  
hypochondria a truth in its inaccuracy.

Honest liars mean well. I think  
that's why I trust them. Dogs  
licking the bottoms of emptied  
food bowls pressing noses to  
doors just ajar sleeping sweetly  
growling tail wagging as if to say  
*I'll eat you up* and *I love you* as I say  
to them as I'm sure your mother  
said to you your golden retriever  
at your funeral growled and wagged  
tongue and tail as if the two halves  
of him split at his atria only oxygen  
and no blood to bone.

I am a dishonest liar. There by your  
desk where you gasped for breath  
and wheezed onto the floor ten  
feet from the hospital, fifteen  
minutes from an ambulance,  
thirty from the truth that may be  
nothing at all or the anything  
I've never believed in, I held  
your coworker and said it's ok,  
it's ok, it's ok, and I didn't mean it,  
not then, and not now.

## **Praying**

My boyfriend taught me to make all kinds of wishes:  
blow the stray eyelash off of the finger, wish.  
11:11 in the morning or at night: wish.

My student can't come to class today  
because there's an active shooter  
at her mother's job. She asks me

to pray for her. I can't tell her that I don't pray,  
so at 11:11 I wish for her, for her mother.  
I don't wish for anyone else at her mother's job.

I haven't asked much of God or whatever might be  
up there, so I try to keep my wish small.  
I tell her that I'm praying for her; I think that I am.

## **Sickness in the Time of Health**

### I. At the Infusion Center

Your head feels like fall. An autumnal softness.

October has been ruined for two years now.  
My IV's wheels creak and swivel on linoleum

and you sit beside me, sighing.  
The nurse with the many-starred name-tag

adjusts me, rag-doll-like, puppet thin, twirls my chair.  
Your eyes, amber siphoned from the tallest trees,

fall slowly to my feet where you settle, a puddle of  
witless love. If we cannot write odes to animals,

who is left?

## II. Walking My Dog

If I say something out loud assume it is to my therapist.  
I have been silent some time now and even the leaves whisper—  
you look so tired, by which they mean broken, as even their  
fabric tears from root-spine and I am so alive in comparison,  
but still they whisper; their commentary catches in my hair.



### III. Applying to Medical School

I have been told that I  
will not be discriminated  
against because my illness  
is physical. I have been told  
not to disclose mental illness;  
I have been told of the wellness  
programs, the wellness, oh  
all of the wellness  
I am allowed only to have  
if I come in holding my own—  
take a penny leave a penny—  
there are the minds of others  
left checked at this invisible door.  
If you need one for a day you can have it,  
but only for a day, please, there is a waitlist.



## **In Sixth Grade I Was "Hanukkan" and I "Spoke Jewish"**

and my teacher threw desks at kids who didn't work  
hard enough—*you're a Jew you should work harder*—  
and in seventh grade we learned about "other religions"  
and a rabbi was a *rabbee* and the teacher needed to tell us  
of her trip to China what a marvel she was in that marble  
so porcelain so china doll *can you imagine a place where having  
blond hair and blue eyes makes you so special?*  
They all shake their heads but if a nod can be loud  
mine is and if a loud nod can disappear  
mine does.

## **When I Was Seven and I Had a God**

Dear NIH,  
Thank you for the food on this table for the  
petri dishes and PCR plates, the many wells  
sustaining my humble home

Dear NIH,  
Please consider my father's RO1 one more time  
his students are trying (for the most part) and he seems  
very grumpy about your panels

Dear NIH,  
I think you are pronounced ni-huh  
which sounds spiritual and you are written  
all over the book-walls of my house

Dear NIH,  
My mother says you are infuriating—  
is this part of God's grace? I have heard of that  
too but they don't mention ni-huh

Dear NIH,  
My home is happy when your money flows  
milk and honey into cancer mice and yeast buds  
I don't know why my parents wish for such silly things but they do

Dear NIH,  
I hear you only like *sexy ideas*  
and I'm told religious people  
don't have those

Dear NIH,  
I was never taught to pray,  
but my friends say it always ends in

Amen.

### **For the Woman TV Scientist**

For the cardiologist, internist, surgeon,  
biomedical engineer, physicist, CSI,  
under thirty, at least seven PhDs—

how you make molecules from  
radioactively decaying tachyons  
(in all of their hypothetical glory)

I'll never know. I'll never breathe in  
your reverse-engineered air  
or sweep your steel-reinforced (self-implanted)  
cheek, I'll never deliver a child in an elevator  
while hot-wiring it frozen,

I'll never shout "*That's It!*"  
while my heels clack through the empty lab,  
but I do know you.

Your fingers are impossibly outstretched,  
your infinite knowledge never enough,  
such that even spandex  
can't get the spectrometer to signal  
the satellite to pipette the right micro fluids  
at the right time. Your only power is behind

a screen or molecular field,  
your morality complex, so cumbersome,  
you willed it to vanish into particulate matter  
to be analyzed away. I know the contortions  
of your face. To be so close to solving the case—

but then—

your feminine emotions.  
Your damn need for sentiment  
(and that episode in which you're inevitably pregnant)  
gets in the way—suddenly science fails you.

It is so hard to be human  
woman, pretty as you are, still taut skin and bone  
to be eventually forgotten  
under the male viewer's gaze.

## Ego Death

My doctor can't hear the clicking,  
so I make the noises for her with my tongue:

click click click

until she says: *stop that!*

click click click

it's as if she can't see  
the Geiger counter,  
can't feel the radiation.

*So you feel like you're dissociating?*  
If I felt it, I wouldn't be dissociating,  
I explain; no, it could be the kamikaze  
of my stomach and intestines,  
the coffee I've been ingesting  
instead of meals,  
but these appeals to reason  
have no affect on my half-life  
and the ways in which I will vanish  
are not gentle.

I try to show her my disappearing  
psyche, how the serotonin  
has filtered out  
with the white blood cells,  
how each piece of me  
has click click click  
left. Bereft of data  
we have only this  
room between us,  
only the blast radius  
to consider.

What are your obsessions?

Mine: a fear of disappearing  
into gamma rays,  
an ego-death

that this counter can sense  
encroaching—  
so I carry it with me;  
it tells me that  
the things we hate  
click click click  
about ourselves  
click click click  
are the strongest  
click click click  
and will survive  
any amount of decay.

## Intimacy

This heat between us—  
the combustion of our two bodies  
sharing oxygen for our engines  
running on fumes, coffee grounds,  
aspirin and seasonal depression—  
I hope it thrives.

\*

When I was born,  
I held together my life  
with twisted string and  
tied my toe shut with skin  
so no tag could be affixed  
to my limb.

\*

In the ICU, a tube curled  
out of my neck,  
a central line to my most private  
blood cells, which having travelled  
my body, knew all.

\*

When loved ones die  
I sit for hours afterward  
always on the same couch  
because it knows me,  
and it will not leave.

\*

There—you know all of my survivals.



## **On Being Accepted to Medical School**

Repeat after me: refreshing my browser is an act of self-harm.

I am seven when my mother says  
my body is not as smart  
as my brother's body

Now I am on page sixteen of this forum  
repeatedly wondering if any of it  
was worth it—

Inside of each of us lives the doll-like appendix,  
the writhing, re-growing liver,  
the desire to forget  
this humanness forever

When the call comes I am alone  
and exuberant  
how success tastes  
lonely and  
exuberant

I don't let the others know  
that the wave of acceptances has begun  
after all this smarter body  
may still fail and become trapped  
on page sixteen  
forever—repeat after me:

I was never one of them.

# II

## **The Truth About Birthdays**

A man comes in and twists you a balloon appendix  
and then steps on it. Your body deflates and contorts

until EMS arrives with funny hats on. The clown takes over  
the camera and snaps pictures smeared with face paint,

and you count the candles on the cake in the ambulance.  
They're one short—you're 30, not 29, and you recite the date

for the doctor. Why, she asks, are you so alone? You tell her  
about the appendix, and the photography clown, and the ride

you know you can't afford, and she smiles her gum-ball teeth  
and eats the sheets whole. All around you—the ICU—

people are prepping for your surgery and they smile too,  
and you realize you are smiling too, for their benefit.

## **The Pomegranate**

What untenable joy it gives me  
to scoop out a spoonful of pomegranate seeds  
from a plastic bag,  
where my lovely laboring has placed them.

At first when I sliced the fruit, cracked it and wrung it,  
picked its carcass clean, I could not help the rupturing  
of its seeds, the deepest purple

Pop one seed into your mouth and the burst of flavor disappears  
so quickly it is more memory than taste.  
But place a whole handful on your tongue and it will saturate you,  
fill you purple and pink with its frenetic savor.

The pomegranate has more calories than two apples—  
to scoop all of those seeds, unmarred  
by the white mottled flesh, into one's mouth,  
is an announcement in human advancement:

look how easily I take the earth's sweetness as my own.

### **In the Mirror**

I would like to be five pounds younger,  
a woman says, smiling her  
piano key teeth.  
I wish I could break  
a chunk from the mirror  
and lay its heaviness  
on the ground.  
My face aches  
with association—  
if I want to try her face on for an hour,  
I can't. If I could, would I still hear  
my mother's voice telling me  
to pluck my eyebrows?  
At home, my dog's chin  
lays on my elevated belly  
as if to say you are my pillow,  
and all is well. I want to give him  
his own mirror  
to see that he is magnificent,  
but he won't feel the weight of it.  
He will see another dog in my bathroom  
without even knowing  
he wears its face.

## **The Me of Me**

My mother believes, I think,  
in a cellular illuminati, one that plots my downfall  
first by unrelated incidents (though the dry skin winks  
at the inflamed gum) and then one by one the organs  
sink into sepsis—this is the only logical progression—

and what a cabal, what an organization of trillions  
in their Machiavellian mission to unseat my consciousness  
and claim my body—to kill the me of me.

One day I might not be her daughter anymore,  
just a large walking machine whose gears are turned  
by nascent killer cells, working through the ranks  
with precision and skipping checkpoints  
as they proliferate. I might begin to grow new body parts—  
new militant branches—

or simply turn up dead without telling her,  
like women my age often do,

mistakenly believing myself in control.

## **The Girl from Ipanema**

I shit you not  
I'm sitting in a café  
at 8 p.m.  
and they're playing jazz,  
and even the moon's voice  
is husky, and this must be  
how the great clichés are  
born, out the wombs of  
mother clichés who must have  
wished their children better than  
elevators, scales to grow big  
and boisterous on, amps  
to tune in the dark;  
two men twist-hug  
to the music and  
everyone watches  
the band though the man  
that leads it was  
just here at the table next  
to me saying what a good year  
it has been for jazz but how  
he fears next year  
won't be such a cornucopia  
of sound, how I can relate  
to this new as I am in this café  
four blocks from home  
where everything sounds vaguely  
to me like The Girl from Ipanema  
possibly because I was forced  
to lip-sync it in a middle-school  
choir in the back because  
my voice was so off-key  
that the chorus teacher  
who must have heard  
me amidst all the children  
could stand for no more abuse,  
but here I am starting feel  
a rhythm that might  
replicate somewhere in the body,  
might make me tap my toe  
if I were the sort

to tap my toe or jiggle a knee  
not impatiently but honestly in  
deference to the greater power  
that rarely sways me  
but tonight I ate dinner alone  
in public for one of the only  
times in my life so I feel bold  
and my knee moves up and down  
easily with a walking base line  
that stops for no man so jubilant  
is he.



## Fora, Isabela, The Galapagos

a baby shark  
washes up ashore and is  
fine, just checking  
you out. big board,  
long pickles five a  
hand and floof  
on the top. so pale.  
so together you go into  
the swell, pick up  
the board, pelicans pecking  
your forgotten flippers  
the waves folding inwards  
left and right breaking  
together only in the middle,  
a soft point that breaks last.

Bob where the waves meet.  
push the nose up  
there. Sea lion? Thinks the  
baby shark. No, too bad  
at swimming. to catch  
a wave, paddle like  
giving birth to another wave.  
Then, *levantate*, stand yourself  
up.  
baby shark won't hurt you,  
he is vegetarian, says one guide.  
baby shark won't hurt you,  
says another, he is probably full.

*Oye, es facil, mirame.*  
look at me. I look  
at my boyfriend on the shore,  
the way his shoulders  
slope like waves.

## **Ode to August**

you're so big now,  
what happened?  
belly blooming from  
fake bacon and  
snippets of chicken  
muscles formed  
from chasing flaxen  
orbs out and back  
over and over  
in sun, rain, wet-nosed  
snow, persnickety  
in your avoidance  
of puddles, self-cleaning,  
you are everybody's  
baby boy, replete with  
aunts and uncles and  
only recently three  
years old. Back when  
you found me, wounded  
by old allies, your neck bled  
raw, I enveloped  
you even as you destroyed  
me and filled me with panic  
and gratitude because to  
love a thing is  
to will yourself alive.

### **On Eating Black Risotto in a Hurricane**

little caskets with herbs twirled around  
hard little grains laced with garlic—I'm  
thinking they could be insects, thoraxes,  
nut shells, but not rice. Their squid ink  
frightens me. At the dinner table my father

eats a whole fish until only an open head is left  
eyes squeezed out and mouth just barely  
open looking west where there are only mountains.

It is flooding on the coast; there must be fish there,  
and maybe fishermen, waist deep and lines cast.

## **Family**

Itzhak Lew writes a letter to family to ask a sponsor of them. He is a Polish politician and poet. He wants to leave for America in 1939. They deny him.

Itzhak Lew tries again, an aunt on the other side of the tree. This branch accepts its weight. He is approved to leave in 1941, two years to the day from his first application.

Itzhak Lew stands with his wife while their three daughters prepare themselves for cold air. His far-left lectures have been well attended, an ear to the ground hears the vibrations of boots; his son is there too. It is illegal for Jews to own land, so his farm is taken. He moves to Kobryn thinking Russia safe; he becomes a teacher again.

Itzhak Lew is in Kobryn on June 24th, 1941, two days after Germany invades Russia. They burn a Jewish hospital and the house of the Rabbi to the ground and command the fire brigades not to put it out. It embraces all of Kobryn. The Germans throw Jewish people into the fire alive. 170 prominent Kobryn Jews are killed, but Itzhak lives.

Itzhak Lew is written in tight script on a monument for October 14th, 1942, as are his wife and three daughters, but not his son. The nazis presumably came and shot them. Some number fled into the forest. Perhaps the boy lives. His name is not recorded.

## **My Grandfather Writes to Me**

*An erasure*

1942. I was four.  
Nocturnal after-work  
gatherings in Yiddish  
with the same visitors.  
Mates flowed endlessly  
served with white  
sugar cubes. Low base whispers  
talk of familiar names  
that started disappearing,  
rumors gathered in ghettos.  
Machines designed to kill.  
Then I was six and seven  
and eight, the only rusito in my class,  
Ashkenazy Jews  
Little Russians.  
School friends would tease me—  
“pum-pum”—nightmares—  
I look my friend in the eye and ask myself:  
could he do it? Could something  
make him do it?  
Could I?

It is not my earliest memory  
but it is the most  
powerful.

## **Autoimmune Jew**

The antigens present  
prevent the passing  
executioner-god from  
destroying memory

like the Xs of lamb's blood  
on the doors that saved  
my genetic line, but my

autoimmunity blows off hinges  
with cytokines—now I am twice  
malignant. Not malignant but  
designed to identify  
potassium channels as enemy,

or more simply: to self-identify  
as epileptic, to allow cytotoxicity  
to be a plague upon this body,

to ask as in all times in which God  
becomes convenient, are my  
membranes not marked  
with sacrifice?

Once I saw a blaspheming Quran,  
Mohammad on the cover,  
and I almost converted.

It would be simpler to be  
alone, genetic drawbacks unassigned  
to my Judaism, such that the cells  
that disappear are my own  
and not possibly my children's.

But that unleavened  
bread sits beside the stove  
so that I might raise its generation,  
treatment stealing cells  
that were protecting me but also against  
me as religion has found me wanting  
but sequestered me, given me shelter

when my somatic home  
refuses me agency.

The truth is that this illness  
presents a quieter death  
of belief in the basket  
that brought Moses and his  
homologous chromosomes home  
than *lishol*, softer than *charut*,  
greater than *hashem*.

## **In My Backyard**

the old oak tree knotted and stooped  
is unevenly liling in its  
wind-howl at evening time,

supping softly on the air I've released.  
Its boughs are bent toward my kitchen window,  
its roots bursting out of the tomato patch.

Before its entrance—the garden blooms  
blustering red tomatoes but then—  
in the center sprouts this unwanted

seed and I ask it to quietly re-root  
in a space more convenient to my needs—  
to cease this relentless overachievement—

but this tree has a vocation,  
and will not leave. The tomatoes  
may wilt, it's true. But it isn't the tree's fault.

The resources are scarce, and survival  
is not a sin. My family too have left  
patch after patch, so today

the tree and I plant our feet and hand in branch  
we sway in the tomato patch,  
winds changing and buckling our knees.



**Use the Dataset BEAUTY to Solve This Equation:**

1.

If each point is a time  
we counted all seven stars  
the sky allowed us before  
choking down Jager bombs  
across a pong table  
split the set in two  
to be analyzed  
as it stands now;

Find the P value.  
If significant  
othering has occurred look for  
where the standard  
deviation sits, and if it  
can be called finding  
oneself or should be considered  
societally irreproducible.

2.

If you can't, I'll do it myself.  
I'll break BEAUTY into parts  
and manipulate them inanimate,  
no longer dancing the binary  
across luminescent screens,  
no longer screaming  
*I need to be understood*  
*somebody solve me!*

If I leave me alone with these numbers  
I'll abuse them—you have to—  
please, please, you have to—

3.

To circumscribe the variables I am  
programming endlessly,  
entering one loop into  
another, feeding the tail

to the dog and the dog  
to the night and the night  
to us, but if the characters  
get together  
will it (the great mystery)  
finally be over?

4.

I haven't even presented  
the equation, I've been so busy  
with my obvious metaphors.

$$F(I) = x/I + u/I - I$$

=> The question posed  
by the numbers is this:

how does *I* go about rending  
peacefully self from cool  
dirty heart, stented and leant, when  
each data point isn't stars or swallowed  
darkness but an organ, a beating  
organ, bitten into like honeyed  
rotten fruit. What is *I*'s value when

the dataset doesn't break anymore,  
and the pieces that are left  
are as small as they get?  
Is the function of *I*, as taken  
from BEAUTY, life?

## **Eventually, Vegans Will Become Cannibals**

It is inevitable. The full circle of the earth  
and all of its dying will leave only the animal  
exposed only the most developed survive  
the weapons they've made the carnivores  
cannot be sustained by dwindling populations  
of animals and so soon there are only vegans,  
whose bean diet and coconut juice allows  
them to survive the apocalypse and as  
even bread, even plant disappears they are  
gluten-free and without allergy all dependency  
is evolved away because they need nothing, so close  
to photosynthesis they eat almost air until  
even the air is inedible and there is only man,  
and the last animals have gone from factory farmed  
to finished, extinct, there are only humans  
having hunted all the rest and the vegans  
who wanted only the best for the environment  
can see the smog encroaching  
the volcano crust of remaining earth  
evaporating and they will be the first to eat  
free-range people—yes! The vegans will eat  
the meek and so will inherit every helix  
and every appendage of this vestigial world.

## **I'm Told I'm Too Glib and I Resent That**

For every star there's a poem with the word  
star in it, for every child  
a coworker that wants you to look at it,  
on every birthday an associated horoscope.

The world is full of wonders.

I wonder, for instance,  
how many *Buzzfeed* articles there are,  
how long it is until they start mating  
with more reputable opeds  
and a *New York Times* listicle  
pops in near the crossword.

I wonder how much water is wasted  
by weak water fountains  
with small jets that don't sufficiently leave  
the spout of the water fountain  
and if that's more or less wasteful  
than exuberant water fountains  
routinely placed near nice suits  
on interview days.

I wonder if dog fur is actually removable  
or if microfibers will exist indefinitely  
on my clothing so that if I commit a crime  
I can always be tracked down by my irrefutable  
connection to my dog.

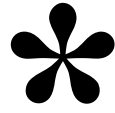
But mostly, I wonder how often anyone reads  
a book of poetry, and enjoys it,  
the way that I enjoy it,  
the words fumbling around  
while my mind dries them of  
their ink and collects  
and recollects their meaning  
until there's just a feeling  
that amidst all this uncertainty  
something right happened,  
and I witnessed it.

## Any Poem About My Body Is a Prayer

Challah loaves braiding together  
make double helixes fragile  
tugging chromosomes together lacing  
neatly, checking themselves for  
deletions. Any mistake is  
visible in the lattice-work, the stitching.

In the year of your lord (not mine):  
the sleeper cells climb spines and set charges  
on power lines. I like to think that I vibrate,  
not seizure but seism.

My basket of synapses is staticky.  
I hand them out—here hand  
here face here thigh here neck  
here neck here neck I am  
    whiplashed and disorganized  
speckled with  
    bruises of my own  
doing clumsy and reckless  
with my    limbs as I am: here  
missing B cells  
    one unit down  
hear my organs thank me  
    smooth muscle taut pumping  
    regularly thank you  
hypothalamus thank you medulla oblongata  
thank you neural tracts and absentia  
for the year I have been no quake and all earth—



## Rorschach

I blew an ink blot across the corner  
of the page: a salvo, a curio,  
my mother, my grandfather's gun—  
did he have one? An army accountant  
at a desk in a county I've since forgotten  
I wish I visited his grave more often, it's there—  
a splatter in the header next to the bed  
where I sat pinned in by white walls  
and told to write asphyxiate write drown write  
quietly or disturb the whiteness and my first  
friend who tells me to disturb the  
disquiet in the margins is  
in the margins blooming flowers stretching  
devouring words the only words  
I'd etched into the desk all pen no purpose  
too swallowed to interpret I think I can  
make out an *I* so I know I was writing  
about me, as I do, as I always do.