

Like Noah

My mother, naturally skinny all her life,
dropped to 87 pounds in those last few weeks.
Her legs and arms were so thin, as if she was
10 years old again, ready to hopscotch
in the littered streets of Richmond Hill.

But she ate. At the end she ate
like she was making up for all the breakfasts she skipped
so I wouldn't have to take the bus to school.
She ate like she was racing death to dessert.

Like Noah, she had to have two of everything—
Two packs of original Skittles, two tropical,
Two of the orchard flavors she always wanted to try.
Two vanilla ice cream cones in Astoria park with chocolate sprinkles.
Two Devil Dogs at a time, always frozen—a family secret.

Two of everything, and still I picked her up
light as a child, and put her to bed.
Two of everything—one for her,
one for the body that betrayed.

Vesuvius

I tell myself that it could have been worse.
That the cancer that ravaged my mother,
bubbling and spreading like hot oil until nothing
was left but the hollowed-out husk
of the woman that was like God to me
Isn't the worst that could have happened.

She could have been there as Vesuvius erupted,
sending carbon dioxide, hydrogen chloride
and Sulphur dioxide to scorch her respiratory system
with her first breath.
During the second breath, the gassy mixture would thicken
In her lungs and harden into a glue-like substance.
By the third, her windpipe would have sealed shut
and she would have suffocated while her insides cooked.

It could have been worse.
In the end, even the pain had left her,
like a lover who slipped out in the night
leaving only a faint impression on his side
of the bed, a ruffling of the sheets
that she could never smooth out.

I Cannot Dwell in Possibility

There is a theory that states
there are an infinite number
of parallel universes, each a mirror
of our own but slightly different.
Each choice made creates another universe:
In this one, I went back to college,
in another, I stayed in the army.
Here, my mother picked up her first cigarette at 14
In the bitter cold, December 1975.
In another, she politely declined.
There is a world where she never worried
that she may have to bury her first son.
The version of me that she deserved
lives in that one.
There's one where I could call her, right now.
Hear her voice, her laugh.
Tell her I love her. Tell her
everything, anything at all.