

IN THE LAST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER

As the leaves turn
Father will be phoned at work
Your wife has just had twins

Anne and I will be the first
and last of our generation
born in the U.S.A.

Father's tears will not be joyous
too much too fast
new continent job language

and relatives who still wait
for his money to boat them
to safety

One unplanned American
would have been
bad enough

Before the burning of fall leaves
Anne and I will be born
a scarce two years after his release from Mauthausen

Our double birth will
pull tears from Father—
he'll never forgive the extra the second twin

Bigger stronger Anne
will make her debut 30 minutes before
the doctor drags me into the klieg lights

Anne will go home swaddled in Mother's arms
both will leave me staring
at light in the incubator

My twin who swam with me
for three seasons will be held
by our big sister

Before pumpkins are carved
Uncle Robert will pick me up
bring me the stranger to that family of four

Walking on ambered leaves
Uncle will carry me
into the home of flames

Stanza Break

IN THE LAST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER

cont.

Father whose rage glowed before he spent
three months next to crematorium chimneys
will do the goose-step into his little girl

No numbers to brand her instead Father/Commandant
will sear her body with his white lava—
indelibly mark her different

Unlike willows that weep in season
this fallen female will weep
from September to September
to September

HURRY UP AND DIE

Your growing hunger makes my knuckles white
Can I hold on a bit longer
Will I last till you die
Will your needs pry my fingers loose
from this ledge

I want you to die
without knowing I hate you
You're too old and too frail
for me to tell you your crimes

Since childhood has sneaked out
of my brain
I retreat gradually
hoping you don't notice
my fewer phone calls
I've stopped stroking your arm
my lips barely graze your cheek
but I do your errands

Sickness unmasks your neediness
hanging on your bent bones
Today you say *Good* out loud
when you hear I can't go on vacation—
if you call I'll be five minutes from you

When I was a child
Good was a silently clenched word
on your tongue

After you married an obsessed man
you must have felt *Good* a daughter-distraction
for his use
then the octopus will leave you alone

Each time your mouth opens wider
your teeth sink deeper into my tit
a larger scream grows inside me
my hands shield my ears from the echo
of your greedy neediness back then

stanza break

HURRY UP AND DIE cont.

Where were you Dear Mother
wrapping gauze over your eyes and ears
vacantly staring over your tea cup

Yes you Wonder-Mother of the perfect house
with your bleached whites
your towels folded in thirds
and then in half
no dust on your porcelain
no lint-littered carpeting

You served gourmet meals at half past five
allowing time enough
for him to eat and complain about work
before the start of the six o'clock news

You Obedient Woman
catered to his every whim
but kept your body in cold storage
and didn't care what he tore at
as long as it wasn't you

Wonder-Mother
that man who never fed me or spoke to me
what did you think that man did
when he climbed up the stairs and came
in my room

GRANDMA DIDN'T TELL ME

Had she known English,
she would not have admitted
to me or anyone,
Grandpa, who died before I was born,
before Hitler marched through Vienna,
was strange,
a meager provider for their nine children;
dark bread with butter often their dinner.
He was too busy playing cards, telling jokes
at cafes. At home he must have been
mean. Mean to how many?
Uncle Hans and Father
hated him. Strange. He must have been strange.
Why else would Father be a pedophile;
Aunt Kate marry a pedophile; Uncle Hans never
have children though he loved them; their sister, Carol,
kill herself as her womb began to bloom; Aunt Grete
threaten suicide, remain shrunken by Aunt Kate's shadow?
Not one photo of him. No one ever said
his name. What did he die of? When?
At his graveside service did fictitious words
spin sugary masks as they did
at Father's, Mother's coffins?
The legacy of pedophilia—how many
generations back? Grandma didn't
tell me Grandpa's name.

ONCE UPON A FABLE

The thing Dear Mother loved
more than any jewel or child
was amorphous, diaphanous, Denial.
She smeared it on her tongue,
dabbed it on her eyelids,
sprayed it on her vocal chords.

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the purest of them all,
Virgin-Mother often asked.
Papa, big sister, my twin and I
in unison we all replied,
You Dear Mother, You Dear Mother. Our refrain
placed upon her face an illegible smile.

Odorless, colorless, undetectable
in her breast milk, Mother had fed Denial
to each newborn girl.

Why did Dear Mother stuff her mouth
with cotton candy, her ears with perfumed waxed,
and often shut her doll-lid eyes?
Sherlock Holmes in reverse—
she rubbed out evidence.

Mother would say on a hot summer day,
Such a good Father, he teaches you how to swim.
My flooded heart wished to reply,
Mother, Sweet Mother, can't you hear
the water rattle in my lungs,
see spittle pass my lips, coughs shudder my limbs?

Instead, coward-me stole flannel Denial
from Mother's cache
to wraparound my wounded heart,
while in my dreams I begged,
When you strip my bed please see the stains he leaves
upon your snow-white sheets.

Alas, virginal Mother knew naught of sex,
so with cataract-eyes she tidied their house
then fed me to the big bad wolf.

I woke one day and said, *No more of this—*
his long pointed teeth, furry body,
probing claws, and her Maddonaesque smile.
I grabbed vial after vial from our medicine shelf
to lace into my very berry-apple compote,
tastier than any Viennese was known to cook.

Stanza Break

ONCE UPON A FABLE

continued

*Dear Mutter, Dear Vater, I have for you
a great dessert, far sweeter than
your flim-flam-flan, my rooty-fruity-compote.*

Within minutes both were apple-pit-cyanide-dead,
eyelashes crusted up like stale strudel,
lips pursed into a bitter-pucker
around their stiff, veined tongues
which stuck out but could not mock me.

OUR IMMUNE SYSTEM IS OUR COLLATERAL

Asthmatic bronchitis, infectious hepatitis,
ulcerative colitis, flu, typhoid fever,
costochondritis, kidney infections, flu,
osteomyelitis, peritonitis,
Sjogren syndrome, flu, hypoglycemia, rhinitis,
sinusitis, flu, thyroid cancer and diabetes —
the visible gifts from Father.

Protracted fear and rage,
the unseen silent killers
inseminated into me,
grew stronger with each rape.
Their accrued psychic harm
is obvious to many.

Not so with damage to the brain —
years of stress-induced,
high glucocorticoid levels
produced permanent neuron loss
throughout my hippocampus,
shrank it — neurons
to the seat of memory burned out,
connective conduits fried.
Had I not buried fear and rage,
had I been strong enough
to remember each rape,
had I murdered my psychic killer
by going public,
my immune system would not
have succumbed.

Hiding, letting buried memories
and feelings secrete hormones
to do their frantic work at night,
magnified, extended the rapist's
thrust long after his death.
Harm to mouth, vagina, anus,
was just the beginning.
Rapists invade each cell
and educate the body,
yield a doctorate in abuse.
Truces occur but scars remain
in the vestiges of our being.

Stanza Break

OUR IMMUNE SYSTEM IS OUR COLLATERAL

continued

Rape is a Grand Larceny
of the self

and the immune system.

Instinct for homeostasis
exists within us.

Trying to retrain my nervous system

I do yoga, meditate, and
write, write, write.