

## 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.