

Ungodly

The socks are of wool or
of some other ungodly material.
You put them on. You know
you will itch. You hate
feeling prisoner
to your skin,
but you reckon
the baby
tethered to you now
might learn to stack the books
in his playpen one day, might
show you
how at not even two
he has managed to carve
his own way out.
His yearning hangs like anvil,
like a threat
to your head,
and you, nearing thirty,
wonder why
you suddenly feel it—
a most wholesome urge
to shrink.

What Your *Higher Self* Wishes To Tell You, in Four Parts

The First Four

*seeing death is like watching the bread dough rise in an oven

*seeing birth is biting into the bread when it's still too hot

*you may not have an inner child but an inner overbearing parent

*if a child has your eyes, they've inherited your limiting beliefs

The Next Four

*religion teaches you *everything is connected*— psychology teaches you that's bipolar II

*you will only hear god on the radio, will wonder how god got things done in Levitical times

*you will listen to rock music at church, will only pay attention to your assaulter's arms raised in ecstasy

*you will read a Bible verse in the corner of your calendar, will tattoo it on your rib, will come to question it later, will understand how trauma turns generational

The Third Four

*coming out is swallowing a live hand that launches shame outside the body; it will also invite the calloused grips of others in to test you

*you will see radio static in the air after the first version of you dies— this is the visual cortex picking up on its ghost

*you will choose not to pursue your calling right before the death of your first child— the next day you will write a poem, every word a descriptor of bread

*your second child will have your eyes, only rounder

The Final Four

*the pain you feel between your eyes is the soul stretching into its legs

*the pain you feel between your legs is the life you didn't choose at twenty-two

*your brain is more flimsy than a walnut, and if you're brave enough to crack it open, you'll find yourself at the end of a piece like this wondering if it's your pastor or your therapist who got it right

*one day the world will feel as light and as clammy as a rubber ball— you'll imagine it melting on pavement, forming the shape of an arrow.

Schrödinger's Woman

All dead, all alive

All married, all yearning

All margin, all error

All pregnant, all suckling

All vegan, all triglycerides

All thirty, all regression

All travel, all *stay together for the kids*

All surrender, all manifesting

All right brain, all right hand

All A type, all prototype

All amygdala, all cortex

All blonde hair, all inked thumb

All faithful, all objective

All red wine, all red pill

All fistful, all buffet

All *Chat Noir*, all *Burning Giraffe*

All eggs, all applesauce

All mission, all ad hoc

All solstice, all midline

All didactic, all infraction

All prayer hands, all middle fingers

All child's pose, all breath of fire

All experiment, all precedent

All assimilation, all remembering

Now we hold the space.

Hypnopompia

/,hipnə'pämpia/ (n): The semi-conscious state preceding waking that is sometimes accompanied by vivid hallucinations.

I've shelled out my own ear by now
 searching for the projector hand—
 applying Jung & Freud & trying
 to mask the moving cogs of thought
 with weather & pandemic talk.

This is why my parents always told me to keep busy—
 to avoid the death trap of thought. If sin is death,
 & death is thinking of every proverbial shoe that could drop,

I am dead, hellbound & shoeless.

I am most susceptible to thought trap in the morning
 as a natural cryptanalyst of dreams, half awake/
 half residual avatar from my prior
 hallucinogenic state. I apply my process
 knowing later I'll be too liminal to function::

Take a stairway, a child born at its base,
 & your sister who passed in 2014. There is a fluidity
 in the symbolism, a juxtaposition, a natural
 commencement & denouement. A meaning here
 practically writes itself.

But add in a final exam as you & baby make it midway
 up the stairs. The scene changes— now you're sitting
 in a Virco, surrounded by unfamiliar classmates, & you can't
 remember a thing about World War I. You grasp
 onto your living son while you try to remember the name
 of the Bosnian who shot the archduke & his wife.

You wake up “sweating bullets” (pun intended),
 wondering what it is that has you so frenzied:

Your REM-deep testing anxiety, or the meaning
of a question on wartime assassination you must answer
while cradling your child in your non-writing arm. What
premonitional shoe could this be?

During your second pregnancy it gets worse. The upsurge
in progesterone has you dreaming
of your deceased sister constantly.

At first she appears Poe-like, in a *dream within a dream*, a ghost
in the cochlear sense, who whispers to a friend of yours
that the lamb *baas* your son mimics in his failure
to produce language are what you must hang onto
when a depression hangs around.

You return to the initial dream state with slapped
cheeks, shaded eyes, a color in your face
that's been lost since 2012, & you recount it all
to a crowd of strangers. It is so veil-like, even
in a dream you know is a dream.

Like a veil in the sense that it is all so close—
the dead, your companions in hypnopompia,
a term you only know because you know your dead
so well— so close.

Even in your wakeful state you swear you could smell
her Dior Poison & that you can still hear
her favorite Paramore song blaring from the speakers
of your Honda Fit.

The dead, *so close* we could be one
evolutionary step away from ripping the damn veil
off our own painted backdrops, finally lay hold of the full
[un]scene we've confined to the artist's dreamscape. Of course now
they'll think you've gone crazy, will convince you
those are just the hormones talking.

The Summer After Graduation

Westwood, California—June 2014

We sit on the roof of Red Roebing, unmindful of its dilapidation, the cockroach your roommate stomped to guts the hour before, or the homemade mouse traps you set in the main room. It's been six weeks since you deemed us *official*, five weeks since Jessica took her last breath and one week since Ashley took hers. I practice my pranayama as June exhales her own trepidation, the damp wind too weighted to suggest an end to my premature sufferings. I did not grow up particularly religious, though now the thought of divine timing brings me comfort, you their parting gift, an exchange of prospect for braving privation—a poetry to all of this. We are too drunk to care about the loose tiling that could render us floor bound with an unfortunate mouse. If it weren't for the nauseating whiffs of Fat Sal's Deli, this moment would feel almost immaculate.

Our view of Ronald Reagan Medical Center is completely unobstructed, its roof vis-à-vis ours as if in standoff. I look at it, this acclaimed Goliath that once housed Nancy. From where I am sitting, I can fit its distance between the ends of my thumb and index finger when I cock my hand into a sideways L. As a helicopter approaches, we feel our last shots of lemon Prestige triangulate between our chests and touching heads. The chopper lands like a savoir onto its mothership and you ask me what I am thinking.

Maybe they're transporting an organ I tell you. Maybe it's a pair of lungs. Maybe they would have been the perfect fit.