

Atacama Desert



DIGGING FOR BONES

2010-2013

Squatter in Squandered Time

Naomi Barber

Digging the Bones 2010-13

Squatter in Squandered Time...Naomi Barber

Murders in Newtown, Connecticut December 2012

rebecca and jeremy, we have had guns in our own personal history - guns shaped much of what happened to us and how things got worked out - to me very badly - we had a hand gun without a safety latch readily available for all of your lives and later a rifle (knives are the weapons women used) I was told when questioning -

but for the grace or god or some higher bigger force we are all here including dad -

not to feel better or self-righteous - but humbled and fortunate - even blessed -

who feels the need for a gun to protect oneself or ones family - hurt and damaged people or who???

no answers here but a touch of reality - we are victims our family at least were held captive by a weapon - i was too timid or too weak to remove it immediately upon jeremy's birth - perhaps life would have been different without this as a constant threat if not in our ready daily consciousness -

time to reflect about a mother a son and classrooms of first graders -xomom

Reflections

...*Having one foot on a banana peel and another foot in the grave... Mark Ruffalo

**This far and no further...Kenneth Rexroth*

**Son of man, can these bones live?...Ezekiel*

**Flagged, and the figurehead with golden tits
Arching our way, it never anchors; it's
No sooner present than it turns to past.
Right to the Last. Next, Please - Philip Larkin*

**Sure this everywhere present is real
enough and eager, yet unable, to tell me
what I am waiting for now.*

**The End
of my
day.*

*I drag my bones
And eyes
To the exit.*

*As evening walks me home,
It's still April...
And today is still tomorrow.
Late Harvest - Dorothea Tanning*

**Modern marine ecology is shaped by the extinction spasms of the past –Mathew E. Clapham*

*I want to write a love poem for the girls I kissed in seventh grade,
a song for what we did on the floor in the basement*

*of somebody's parents' house, a hymn for what we didn't say but thought:
That feels good or I like that, when we learned how to open each others' mouths*

*how to move our tongues to make somebody moan. We called it practicing, and
one was the boy, and we paired off -- maybe six or eight girls -- and turned out*

*the lights and kissed and kissed until we were stoned on kisses, and lifted our
nightgowns or let the straps drop, and, Now you be the boy:*

*concrete floor, sleeping bag or couch, playroom, game room, train room, laundry.
Linda's basement was like a boat with booths and portholes*

*instead of windows. Gloria's father had a bar downstairs with stools that spun,
plush carpeting. We kissed each others' throats.*

*We sucked each others' breasts, and we left marks, and never spoke of it upstairs
outdoors, in daylight, not once. We did it, and it was*

*practicing, and slept, sprawled so our legs still locked or crossed, a hand still lost
in someone's hair... and we grew up and hardly mentioned who*

*the first kiss really was — a girl like us, still sticky with the moisturizer we'd
shared in the bathroom. I want to write a song*

*for that thick silence in the dark, and the first pure thrill of unreluctant desire,
just before we made ourselves stop.*

Practicing – Marie Howe

**Night after night, day after day
They strip your useless hopes away
The more I take the more I give
The more I die the more I live
Tempest, Bob Dylan*

**We're in the later phases of life, so we are holding on now for the great promise of the last two years of our lives
having lost our minds, having angry immigrants change our diapers for us.*

T.C. Boyle

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Belle Charlotte Plessner Weiss Died - November 30, 2009

Charlotte

Charlotte your legacy
Vouchsafed was safe with us
Judaism deep in our being our bones
We the two children
You disparaged
You didn't trust
Entrust
With your religion
Judaism
The Judaism of the *Holocaust*
The religion
You disparaged
Ran from
Denied lied about
Judaism your identity
Your personhood
Charlotte our mother
The idiomatic Jew
The Jew of the *Holocaust*
The remnant Jew
The *Diaspora* Jew
The head-beating shrieking Jew
A woman displaced within herself
She belonged nowhere
She belonged everywhere
Charlotte our dear
Tormented mother
You were the wound
The ache the pain
The everyman/woman
You were wild and crazed
Filled with the distemper
Of eight million Jews
Who wept rebelled called out
To be remembered in you
You their living embodiment
Their hometown Queen Jew
Twisted branch clawed up trunk
Tree convoluted stalked by nature
And the sun's errant rays

Bluma Charlotte our Mother
We were never your children

The right ones
As were your sibling's offspring
It was good to give them succor
They were your collective your group
Your rightful family
We just never fit in
Predictably life has its
Not so subtle ironies
Its topsy-turvy ways
It is Rachel who now honors you
It is Rachel my brother's first born
It is Rachel you often regarded
Mounting comparisons
With your critical perfectionist eye
Jewish Luftwaffe Aryan
Amorphous free floating the definition
Now Rachel and her husband Mike
Observant Mike and Rachel
Have had twins within three days
Of you and your twin brother's 95th birthday
A girl and a boy
One named Charlotte your name
And one named Nathan a brother
Who did not live beyond his sixth birthday

Sibling symmetry brought you to nursing school
With brother Morris's death from leukemia
Leaving behind an infant and widow
At nursing school free room and board
If not stocked with books
Reading kept you in tact
There you found your body double
A mad woman your age
To whom you pushed food
Through her cage-like room
Walls smeared with her fecal matter
God you told me that so often
Did she know of your fascination?
Your fear of her
The merging of identities
Inseparable agonies

Nathan and Charlotte
Will have the best mother
Almost makes me weep
They will have the mom

My brother and I never did
The mother you had
Eva long braid warm smile
Never afraid to hold you close
Kneading warm dough into *Challah*
She pulled you in
And loved you as she feared you
And was afraid for you

Charlotte and Nathan
Have Rachel for a mom
Almost makes one believe in God
Mother it is all too much
I am overcome overwhelmed
I scour the heavens
I see something celestial cyclical
We longed for your wisdom
Your unequivocal love
Life does go on
All that was good
Pure of heart is again
This the actuarial legacy
The spirit and essence of Judaism

In the end Mom we heard you
If you couldn't see or hear us
All of the cousins
Who took such good care of you
Showed such deference
We honor them today as well
This is Jerusalem and Poland and Galicia and Silesia and...
This is Millburn New Jersey you loved it so
They should put you on a stamp
Today a baby girl Charlotte folds into her mother's body
And she will become
The girl of your best and finest dreams
And Nathan will live a long life this time around
Embodying Joe your twin with his wisdom
Without the agony of his own troubled personal life

We are onto something here
Life's interminable cycles have come full circle
Vibrant strong viable wonderful magical
Charlotte and Nathan
All of us rolled up into one
In the end the Plessers

No matter the challenges
Just wouldn't come undone

Mother you best expressed
Your sanguine and sane love of life
It was in your art
Retrieved in foundries of marble
Marvelous representations depictions
Of mother and child
Of Rabbi's dancing
Right off the paintings of Chagall
And there Einstein a kindred spirit
The advent of these births
Almost bring me to my knees
Your sculptures of mother and child
Have come to life in Charlotte and Nathan
We see we feel it we hear it we believe it
Inside the stone two little dear hearts pulse and beat
Charlotte and Nathan, Nathan and Charlotte

Bluma your demonic temptation preoccupation - death
The ending at the mercy of your own agony
Had you held together a little longer
A witness to this day of the miraculous
An arc of rebirth of timelessness
History nearly torching life's continuity
Yiddish lullabies can be heard
Waves lapping the jetty
In Long Branch New Jersey
Charlotte and Nathan Bluma sings to you
If she can't hold you in her own arms
Her signatory songs are in the air
The ones she sang to each new baby
Oyfn Pripetshok about the Jewish alphabet - alef bet
Saying "the history of the Jews is written in tears"
I refuse not to believe not today, not anymore
Our family history is written in song and prayer
Of promise of possibility of hope
Of hymns and *Hosannas*
Charlotte and Nathan bringing this to us once more
Reminding of an estimable and powerful legacy
"The last of life for which the first was made" (Robert Browning)
Mother you never did die after all
We are witness today and always we are reborn.

Naomi Barber
October 12, 2012

Not Home Yet

Are They Dead?

Not home yet
Are you dead or alive?
Prelapsarian moment
The door unlatches
Knot stomach lurches
Back to grinding
Moments of truth
Are you there
For me to touch feel see
The scepter of time
Clocks hours chip away
Mr. Rogers on yet
I slip inside
Two heads pitched together
Symbiotic their waiting
Momma slips in
Looks to see
They are breathing
They are watching
I have come as promised
As Mr. Roger's ties his shoes
Entering a world of imagination
We dressed up for his opera
Lady Elaine is a fairy princess
This Gordian knot of motherhood
Subways take me to the other side
I am beside myself
I forget them
Whistling at work
Call only for emergencies
I am gone in another world
Two babies expire die disappear
I forget them
The subway moves me on
I am gone and then
I reappear are they there?
Two babies soaked floppy
Drawn from my limbs
How to begin how to begin
How to leave them
I do it each and every day

Neon blink bleak choice
Devour destroy eat them up
Or step inside a subway car
Stygian compromise
Prelapsarian moments
Going off and coming together
Before time before life
Before I understood
My life had
To move beyond them
I had no choice
The father the seed
He placed in me twice
Returning bountiful
Murderous rage
Woven into the fabric
Of our lives
I had to leave each day
To grab for and gasp the air
I am there I am here
The working clock tic tocks
They the children never appear
Not to commingle barb reality
I go off to stay intact
To keep alive
Click I clasp the doorknob
Mr. Roger ties his shoes
They don't look up
They know I am home
As I said I would be
The Gordian knot of motherhood
Dictated that I leave
I needed to breathe
I am not here yet
I would say each day
Stepping out of the grimy
The officious cling of work
Throw on whirly hot colored
Mexican skirt and peasant shirt
Spread out my thick ruby silk locks
Sit down and wrap my legs around
The bundles of babies
The trusting babies
They were yet to know
The hurdles to go through
Breaking the bonds of vows

I moved on another wilting face
In the gnarled knot of working mothers
We broke the house up
He got the kids I got the kids
Evenly matched hour for hour
Minute for minute
I wanted life to be
So much more
Than just about survival
I had kids
Hacked the family to bits
To have us each more or less live
Never the knot loses its grip
Mom without a husband
On her days
Clicks the door open
Yet I am never here to stay
Never again to be here to stay
The rules of the court held sway
I left with vestigial remnants of motherhood
Vestigial motherhood
Fucking motherhood
Terrible motherhood
Wish I were dead motherhood
Too much to love never enough
Banged and bruised inevitable
They go forth from my womb

Naomi Barber
2011

I Am My Most Me

I am my most me
Magnificat thunders (by Herbert Howells)
The sanctuary of *The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine*
My granddaughter Sophie struggles with her songbook
The tight accordion pleats of the prayer collar
Rub against her imprisoning sensitive skin
Juggling book and itch her nine-year-old
Voice lifts with the Cathedral choir
Joined by choirs from New Haven and from Princeton
She says she lip synchs to annoy her father
But you can see the collar pleats bob

I am my most me
Evensong at The Cathedral
Eyeing the couple across
Imagining they are tourists
Juggling shutting down cell phone and distaste
Or discomfort
*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost*
A crawl in their throats
They are lovers he goes down on her
They are happy with each other
They sleep tightly bound
They swap secret glances
She regards me on the pearl of the knit
Later discover they are the grandparents
Of Sophie's two close friend's Jade and Ruby
Miniature nine-year-old twins
Whose parents are in LA
They are Jews like me
They grandparents like me
They love each other
I loved neither husband
Their son my doctor saved my life
Pulled bunches of polyps like small grapes
From my nose I can breathe
If awash with mucous which
I need to spit out like street vagrants or truck drivers
I constantly blow my nose
So that the mucous doesn't pile up
Snow banks on the curb after a plowing

I am my most me
Sweat and spit
Salt and silt
Regret and sorrow
Pour from me
Pus of many shames ooze
Last breathes holy prayers
Final chances for truths
I lug this life of mine around
It dissipates in small tethery bites
Short stabbing sobs
Gobs of mucous
Teeth have fled my lower gum
Rich enough and privileged to
Have a tightly fitting bridge, false teeth
The man in the Park today
Following Ti Chi greeted me
Had been a postal worker retired
Each day brings something new
He tells me
He is 68 I am 70
We swap names
His teeth as well are gone
He leaves the gaps
For the sun the air
The new lease for each day
They called me Dr. Go happy
At the post office
He tells me and said our
Astrological signs meshed
Waving he left, after we shook hands
These momentary love affairs
Fleet but brimful of tight gaze
And truth
Nothing held back
In the brief exchange
Dr. Buber love moments
Intense lasting
A bountiful minute a lifetime
I find someone new to love
Each day

I am my most me
Found my missing duck the domestic one
As they park attendant called it

When I asked where it had gone
Don't know
And moments later there it was
Meet a dog-walking friend
Who also has *put down* his dog
Not another dog for me, he says
He walks dogs to exercise
Has diabetes we remember
His long time walking friends
Two women who died within
Five months of each other
They were good friends
Their hearts meshed he tells me
They were very close
They were lovers I think
Gay men that seems natural
Maybe even more than
Heterosexual love
But women
Still hard to fix on imagine

I am my most me
My scalp more exposed
To sun and the elements
My hair a straggly dog's
Going every which way
Bald a baby's
It is coming
Around the bend of that circle
The life cycle
No teeth no hair
And spots climb my wrists like ivy gone wild
And my tummy pouts
My skin hangs like slabs of wizened aged meats
Pancakes shmancakes
Flapjack chest toothless gums
Death better come
My tits bob crouching just above my waist
Soon food will have no taste
Stuffed nose like a turkey breast
No taste buds and ears prick
How high can the volume go
Before splitting up the TV
Sound taste body shape
Metamorphosis
Death dances on me

I am on the point of no return
Can't fix these skin spots stains
Laser won't work
Sunbeams will jerk them right back
With a peek from the daylight or sun
Step up smile
Girl balding teeth missing
Breasts sagging skin leopard spots
How did I get to live this long
That is the miracle of me
Surviving sadness that warped
But did not destroy me
My mind numbing
Memory jiggles just so far
True love never made it
Longing veered to desperate
The scent of desperation
Throws contenders in reverse
Ecstatic moments merged bodies
Fiction words on page
How sad very sad that makes me
Life an opened field a quicksilverish run
I got to be seventy
I got to stand on the mountaintop
I look back enveloped in the deepest cloud bent
This is the all of all
I will not be spared
Of agings' further indignities and cruelties
More to dissipate flake off more to disappear
More and more goneness
Life living to spare left unused
The reason for my longevity
Maybe ardor would have capsized me
Maybe a brain that took in
More than it kept out
Would have killed me off
Being numb and off-putting
The staying power the answer
An unexhausted life a life half-spent

I am my most me
Here I am flapjack chest
Will you ever forget I asked about that?
Sophie asks, *No*, I answer
It was a feature I proudly held to
I had two of them and no lumps yet

Now that joins the pantheons of appraisals
I give each day of what has just aged
Time snatches me piece by piece
Children's story from long ago
Why are your breasts like that
Sophie eyes them
Never noticed
Just happy to have them
Still two intact
Age gravitational pull
As my mother informed me
As she gave me
Another installment
Of how we age
How our body changes
Cold and clinical
Flattened breasts, gravitational pull
Evidence
I am going down on the count
But not in defeat

I am more me
I am the most me
I am fully with me
Not distant and filled with denials
Filled with rationalizations
Forgetting dreams as they happen
Forgetting names with faces
Mostly stars of TV and movies
Thanks to *The Web*
Entering clues I get the names back

I am my most me
The Cathedral bellows spoke
No love no man
Never will never did
But I am a mother
That dreaded state
Killer claw
Rapacious mouth
Eyes tear through protective veneer
I am that mother
But not feared
I am a grandmother
And they the children like me
And welcome me

Each of them

I am my most me
I sit in the Conservatory Garden
Surrounded by fall *Mums*
Just splashed out of an impressionist painting
I sit on a bench I languish
I don't think
I can see or love the flowers
More than others
I do not I have a higher ground
That I alone have the secret of good living
Of the worthwhile
Her arrogance, my mother's
A bob of salt on the open seas now
She can no longer hurt me
She is not the whispering death saint
Visiting and shadowing
My days belong to me finally

I am the most me
I sit on the bench it is Tuesday
I am no longer working
I stay until
My mind and heart wanders
I walk off
I find the swan I find the duck
I am the most fortunate woman alive
I am alive
I am my most me
Nothing held back
As I dissipate
Inconceivable
That I would be this happy
This full
A suicide walkabout at twenty
At seventy
See my face going old
Before my very own eyes
Which still see
And I know that sadness has lifted like fog
The sorrow of what I will not have
And will not know
And did not do
Regret shallow like a drying and dying pond
Not for me this time around

Lift with the choir
An awareness that death climbs me
Like ivy like rose of Sharon
At *Evensong* in The Cathedral
My granddaughter a chorister
My father now dead a dozen years
On my shoulder
We weep when we hear
Beautiful music
I weep and he does as well
The tears also sprung from my eyes
In LA when we came upon
The UCLA marching band
During Hudson's school fair
I was the little girl
Running behind my father
As he walked astride
The Barringer High School marching band
At Saturday fall football games
Jeremy and I cheer them on
Our feet lifting
In rhythmic steps marching steps

I am there I am here
I am everywhere
Where there is me
Leaving nothing behind
But the body that breaks off
Like leaves from fall trees
In the chill of each hour
I am awash with sunlight
The sun draws itself to me
As does the moon
I am in my own dream
I am all of me
Death climbs
Like an over-heated horsemen
But not yet
I stand my ground
Not ready yet
To climb the swan
To mount the horse
To drift off
In final breaths and gasps
Not yet

I am the most me
Now right now
That I will ever get to be
That I will ever be
That is what I want
To be fully and completely me
Before I am deceased
My body like scrap metal
My mind like crystal
Unearthed forbidden
Leeches sucking life
I will not die
Until I am fully alive
What is what is not
What was what was not
Is what I've got

Naomi Barber
October 2010

Cloves of Garlic

*I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils
Neat in their boxes, dolor of pad and paper-weight, (Theodore Roethke)*

Garlic clove pick off the floor
Stuffing trimmings
First pilgrims Thanksgiving meal
Journey to the end of the world
To the end of time
Die and un-die this child of mine
Left the house before the guests arrive
The tattoo 315 on every wrist
Public school 315 their school
Kindergarten through grade 8
I stay out until they leave
This the day of their annual feast
The day after the day after
Year after year they gather
More than five years for this ritual
This annual breaking of bread
They all thirteen of them
Are by now twenty-two
Our home our home our home
They sit around the mahogany dining table
Tablecloth and cloth napkins
They bring out the long-stem wine glasses
They dine on a traditional Thanksgiving meal
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight

The garlic clove for the stuffing
Death death death
Death shall have no dominion (Dylan Thomas)
The host my son died and came back again
Cloves of garlic *dolor of pencil and paper-weight*
I only imagine the meal
The friends most from the first grade
Or the first year of high school
Before before before
Clove of garlic *dolor of pencil and paper-weight*
Before his stomach was pulled out
Every bit of a septic intestine
Pulled from his body
Swirling the poisons the backed up poop
Died and won't wake up

Die and wake up
What is it like to die and more than once?

Dolor of pencil and paper-weight clove of garlic
Very little to clean up
Got back at 10pm they were all gone
The celebrants
Pots and pans and serving dishes drying
On the kitchen table and granite counter top
Utensils still wet but spanking clean
What remained of the meal
Neatly placed in the refrigerator
In microwave safe containers
Just a little vacuuming for the living room
I would have done that he says
As he comes out of his room in the morning
How was everything? I ask
Just perfect, perfect, thank you
I am so happy to have our home
Used in this way so happy I say

The length of intestine heaped
In some hospital container
To be biopsied
His poop streams from his stomach
Into an ostomy bag
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
Clove of garlic
Live and die, die and live
315 tattooed on a wrist
On many wrists
Friendships like these
Don't often exist

Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
Clove of garlic
Home Sweet Home
I went to see *The King's Speech*
My oldest son represents the writer
The theater was crowded
People cheered at the end
Walked off and out
Into the chill of the November night
The day after the day before
Went to a wine bar
Had two glasses of chardonnay

And a bowl of roasted potatoes

My father ate potatoes
Over an open fire in a vacant lot
These were prepared gourmet
I walked on
Not time to go home yet
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
The chill embraced after the wine
At the tick tock of ten
I walked back into the house
No one was there
They had all left
Pots and pans and utensils
Set out to dry
Missed the clove of garlic on the floor

Thanksgiving Day I was alone
Invited no where except to Maxine's
Who forgot she invited me
She may be an eminent philosopher
But she is ninety-two and surfs for reverence
To be revered I am just an old friend
With me she is nearly invisible
She went to Maureen's
Where her blood could get a bit of rush
Her guilt may nearly kill her
But nevertheless, nevertheless
I dined on turkey and the fixings
Cost a fortune but gourmet
From Dean and De Luca
Walked there through the Park
The day was gray with a chill
But then a next day comes
Die and wake up die and come back
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
Garlic clove on floor
I have much to be thankful for
Chardonnay and a bowl of fancy potatoes
When I arrived the house was intact
Hard to even know all of the 315's were here
Having their annual Thanksgiving meal
This I know
I have a son who died and came back to life
I have a son who is alive
I have a son with no stomach

I have a son whose poop oozes and falls
From his body into a plastic bag
Prosthesis of a sort
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
It is the ordinary
It is the extraordinary
One son dines the day after with old friends
And one son makes a movie *The King's Speech*
Oscar buzz about that one
My daughter and her family
Had Thanksgiving with her father
In the Berkshires from which I had been banned
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
Next year you'll come here for Thanksgiving
My oldest son says almost a command
Yes, I say I will
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
Pick garlic clove off the floor the next day
This is the world after death
After dying and coming back
This is the world anticipating death
My turn soon but there won't be a return
I will have walked the life span out
I will have said goodbye
Without resentment or regret
I will no longer hold sadness
About pencils and paperweights
Backing off getting a distance
I can see that my children live
Rivulets of the usual the every day
Dolor of pencil and paper-weight
Garlic cloves for markers
I have known the inexorable sadness of pencils
Coveted sunrises and sunsets
Glimpses caught a swirling sky
Mornings and nighttimes
Of late even regret too heavy
Obliterate memory
Pain and joy meld
A life gone by
Too much untried
Dying to close my eyes
A last and final time

Naomi Barber –The Day After Thanksgiving 2010

Biting and Scratching Myself Suffering Not Finding Words

Figuring it all out
Nail biter tearjerker
Pulp fiction
Insanity lunacy
My magic kingdom
Childhood torn asunder
I wonder
Manipulation or desperation
The hot coals of fists
On breasts on head
Garbled words
Seasoned with great
Gobs of spit
Wails just short
Of ear drum busting
I just want to die
Your life or mine
The subtext
This orgy
Of fisticuffs
To face and breasts
The sparring partner
Her family
Her life's failures
Her inner pain
To subdue
Raucous flights
Of self-flagellation
Day to night
Shaping hands
Of memory
Terrorist mother
Terrified mother
Cunning mother
Despairing mother
Blood sucking mother
Frightening mother
Rematches with life
Taunting death
Her daily bread

I might have hit and scratched myself till the blood flowed as I had seen her do in moments of despair.

There are lots of women who are attracted to tyrannical men. Like moths to a flame. And there are some women who do not need a hero or even a stormy lover but a friend, not because they are feeling empty themselves but because they enjoy making you full too. And remember that friendship between a woman and a man is something much more precious and rare than love: love is actually something quite gross and even clumsy compared to friendship. Friendship includes a measure of sensitivity, attentiveness, generosity, and a finely tuned sense of moderation.

One day when you get married and have a family of your own, I very much hope you won't take me and your father as an example of what married life ought to be.

Amos Oz, The Tale of Love and Darkness

Mother you too scratched yourself raw
You castigated against your marriage
Your father...
You would say and then the list
Of the egregious
We all failed you each day
Where were your wise words
Guiding this young
Ever constricting heart
Amos Oz 's mother as she slipped
Off earth on her way
To her self-medicated death
As she fell from his life
Her despair most of his air
And when she knew
She couldn't stop her hand
The decision made
The poisons in hand
She told him this...
Witness to her self-flagellation
Her staring off into the space
Searching for way out
Charged with words
Pulled from earnest texts
She knew
She could not keep her promise
Her pact with his birth cries
Stuffed like moth balls
Into her mouth

Mother, you died finally
Were you relieved
Did you know
You actually provoked

Dove into the charged death
You kept begging for
It happened much
To your surprise
You were always
Just playing at life
Fits and tantrums
Travels a loyal husband
Children who stuck around
And grandchildren
Who found the good
In you
But I refuse
Why didn't you tell me
About love and friendship
Murderous as Heracles
Our mother
She beat herself
Because she was no good
Because she was frantic
Because she was desperate
Because she was alive
Because she wanted to scare us
Because she wanted to control us
Because she wanted to shame us
Because inner pain nipped a rabid dog
Because she hated our being alive
Because despair was riveting
Because she hated her body
Its fumes and desires
Because she couldn't reach the promise land
Who knows what tipped her hand
Into this explosive buffoonery
Precise time steeling time
Each day a reign of fisticuffs
Diaspora distilled
Manic pausing briefly to refuel
Without our eyes to witness
Blank stares of disbelief
Would she have sought
This way to emotional
Release and relief
It was methodical
It was disorderly
It was comical
She never died

Despite fervent pleas
Only we did little by little
How much can you watch
Your mother your wife
Beat herself to a pulp
Begging death to enter her
Our inner balance short-circuited
What the counter weight
Still I can't find sympathy
She over did it
This incessant
Cattle call for attention
This herding us in
We became inured
The day eclipsed
By her rage self-flagellation
Programmed rants
To steal time
Where is the kindness
In my heart
Where is the forgive
Where is *live and let live*

I don't adore her
I hate her
Dead I still hate her
And if tenderness seeps in
Tries to take hold
I back off
I need to hate her
To justify
The inadequacies the failures
In my own life
I lived under her cloud
Of doom and self- destruction
I could have run away
The therapist said
I didn't

Amos oz went on to marry and love his wife
His first reader as he calls her
He found a friendship
I married contemptuous enemies
So soaked by
The bile shooting off her
As she beat her chest and temples

Falling on the floor
Never quite opening the oven
Or furnace door
Sylvia Plath had the decency to
Rather than drag it out
Despair ennobled
By self-sacrifice
She stomped on our lives
And still tramples
Death breaths curled toes
Death roamed and took over
She slipped into its arms
This was the lover she waited for
Catcalls and pleas
Finally death caved and gave in
She was ninety-two
He waited patiently
This death is a he
She begged
For rape for whipping
Religious warriors
Switches on back
Until blood spits
From switched tracks
She never really believed
He would enter her
And close her down
We witnessed the cloak
Scoop her in
In the end all that watching
Her geyser of pain
Held captive
Our task to witness
For naught
She never mentioned
Our father or us
She wanted her *mommy* back
The one she spit at
The one she cursed and railed at
We were just lumped assembled
A long line of the tormented
But no eyes were sadder
Than her mother's

As she shut down
She climbed into the waiting lap

Of her mother
The art restorer in the end
The great revisionist
She reclaimed her birth
A perfect childhood
Her guilt her conscience dumped
Long before these last breaths
This crazed mother
This birthing mother
Stealing minutes each day
To stifle and suffocate
Transfusing us blood exchange
Daily bread daily breath
Not life death

Johnny ate cactus

The small potted cacti rested on the windowsill, and Johnny, as Bettelheim called the boy, "had the disconcerting habit of plucking one of the leaves full of sharp thorns, putting it into his mouth, and chewing it." Bettelheim said that once in a while he saw Johnny's lips bleed from the prickly spines, and that watching him wound himself was upsetting. After witnessing months of this self-mutilation, Bettelheim expressed his dismay, in response, Johnny said, "What are two years compared with eternity?" It was the first time he had uttered a full sentence... (Bruno Bettelheim)

Does this fit
Does this depict
Capture
Mother's seething daring rage
Were these daily
Ritualistic beatings
This self-flagellation
Cacti to her mouth
Needing to bleed
To get her pain out
To rid her body
Was it for her relief
Or for us to see
Make responsible
For her curse, us

To beat to bleeding
Solipsistic unnerving
What to make of you mother
You were not the mother
Of Amos Oz
You were not Johnny

You were so ordinary
You were so unworthy
Our space our time
Contaminated
With your cantankerous actions
Your greed
Your voracious throttled appetite
Vampire mother
You sucked us clean
Living beyond you
Held captive by you
Could we have run away
Or at least shut our eyes
And chosen not to listen
As you bellowed and howled
Compelling transfixing
Mortifying and yet
I look back the fool.

Naomi Barber
June 2010

The Source

The source
The venom
The hives
Emboldened
Erupting
At will
Random blotches
The source
Thick mucous
Clogs
Tumbles
Backward
Bronchial tubes
Stuffed
Standpipes
Internal
Disarray
Upper respiratory
System breaks down
Held hostage
Gasps
Grab for air
Holding on
Truculent
Visited by wrath
Regret rage
Backed up
The source
Clumping
Mucous
Lungs
Stuffed up
Tongue licks
Grabbing for
Gobs of goo
Oozing
Dripping
Relentlessly
Nasal backslide
Remorseless
The source
Grabbing
Gagging
Great gobs

Goo
Gulp
Gasp
Raspy
Cough
Wheeze
Lungs
Steam pipes
Rattle
Release
Residue
Forget forgive
Can't won't
Mouth
Gulping frog-like
Reduced to this
Can't forget
Can't forgive
The source
Bronchial tubes
Hostage
Truculent
Relentless
I gasp
Grab
For air
Frightened
Too weak
To scream
The source
I am dying
Death holds me
Taut unrelenting
Stranglehold
Nose runs wild
Drip, drip, drip
Polyps
Globules
Jellyfish like
Plump barriers
Slowly suffocate
Forgive forget
Can't relent
Gag and choke
Cough and struggle
Stay calm

Not to succumb
Can't breathe
Coughs
Guttural
Bay dog growls
I am beset
Beside myself
Hold it together
Not to panic
Hive
Tapestry
Burst forth
Legs torso arms
Face spared
Twisted
Anguish
Can't breathe
Fingers claw
Dig
Rip into hives
Bathed in blood
Fierce red droplets
Fingers can't resist
The pull the tug
To hurt
To scratch
Until bled out
Scalding showers
Ease the itch
Cool water runs
Then peroxide
Rituals for relief
Napkins
Roil the floor
Diseased litter
Clumping bunching
Stuffed with mucous
Gagging green
Brown thick
Nightmare
Forgive forget
Can't won't
Remorseless
Relentless
Ruthless
The source

Legs dangle off
Bedside
The mirror
Midnights
Being eaten alive
Looks with pity
Avenging
Rebel inside
Can't won't
Forgive forget
The ruthless itch
The source
This the death
I cried for
Here the girl
Ripened
With longing
Died long ago
And yet
A light
If dimmed
Lives in me
Can't won't
Forgive forget
Eruptions
Refusals
Stuck
Can't won't
Forgive forget
Hardened
Fear
Stirs
Disturbs
Mother visits
Her unsettling rages
And head beatings
Incursions
Reverberate
Hatred and fear
Mother's death
Did not set me free
I rip at myself
I bleed
I can't breathe
Gregorian chants
A chorus of disbelief

She beat her head
A wild uncanny dancer
She wanted to live
Too much
Sacred scared
She beat herself
Remorselessly
Relentlessly
To keep in tact
She dared death
Feared death
More than most
She beat and beat and beat
Her head
And lasted ninety-two years
Can't won't
Forgive or forget
The source
Agitation and disease
Ripened
To these maladies
Sidelined
By her screams
Urgent
To be alive
To not die
Ablutions
Eyes closed
Finally
Can't won't
Forgive or forget
Cautionary tale
Backed up
Dreams regret
Overcome
Choked by
Undigested
Undiluted past
And yet
Not yet death
Not to die yet
Life not finished
With me
Troubled child
Vows lie
Deceitful bride twice

Honor your mother and father

My brother constantly

Warns

It is not about love

But duty

For the observant

Jewish suburban relatives

She was their lunar star

She was their celebrity

She was their Naomi, not I

We gave our young lives

In honor and fear

My brother

Was backed up

Dead emotionally

He, my brother, told me

And I relinquished any chance

For true love

I became the blur

The primed canvas

She painted

And unpainted and painted

You are not a true artist

Until you are not afraid

To destroy what you have painted

My friend the artist tells me

She constructed and deconstructed at will

I lay beneath the wily willy-nilly brush

A subject, her life work

The portraiture

Done and undone

And from which

I never had the will or strength

To move off and run

Hives run wild

Create havoc

My chest rebels

The hell

I created for myself

This is the house

The body in which I dwell

The source

Her hand

Cold and resisting

Of which

I could never let go

Can't won't
Forgive or forget
The source
Held finally
In her clawed
Arthritic old hand
The source
Could have run
Stayed in place
Choice
The source
She died finally
I never left

Naomi Barber
December 2009

GRIEF

Rant

The Story of O – Oh my!

You don't count
I don't count you
As a husband
You were an outlier
I was a liar
Self-deception my game
How else
To promise myself
To you outlier
Prick bad worse words
Cross my mind and lips
You are a sex crime predator
Killing off female desire
Enslaving entangling
Extinguishing
To think you harvest
Female desire
Genetically hybrid
Half man half taunt
Circus in town
Riding off
In the sunset
With this one or that one
We are all your whores
Pretender to *Marat Sade*
Sadist and poseur
Snuff out the life force
Females beware
A cute Satan from
The Bronx
To woo
You appear
Lover supreme
Gathering
Starved and lonely hearts
Opening like clams
In sandy morning heat
Keep or toss
Sizing up
What can be offered up
Ambition driven appetites
Tallies assets
Racing sheet

Best horse
To advance
A well-charted course
From Bronx choirboy
To intellectual hot shot
This a page
Straight out of
The Finkler Question
He wanted to be a Jew
Like the one's who
Drove him to hives
And distraction
At City College
Bronx choirboy
Dreams to distraction
Of becoming a Jewish *intellectual*
His the queasy artistry
Nachmacherei (imitativeness)
Big leap grand quest
Stacked in bathroom
Family's sole reading material
National Inquirer
Now he reads Foucault
Gift or bait or lure
Offered up or bought him
Madness and Civilization
How apt for enraptured
Seduction via intellectual property
He rises from the mist
Feral boy to *Francophile*
Sniffing the possibility in me
The fox races after the hound dog
100% Bona fide
Upper West Side Jewess
Impatiently crazily desirous
To reside in the heartland
Of intellectual *Jewish Dom*
Unabashed eager
To put down roots
Migrate from festering
Italian Bronx
To his rightful home
I opened my door
And my heart I succumbed
Victorian like hysteria
Drove me to his side

Ex-battered wife
Promise of *fountain of youth*
To be young and in love
Weeks into being
A weak-kneed supplicant
Dragged off to cosmetic surgeon
To tighten a prematurely
Slackened jaw line
Never even noticed before
Cool-headed rainmaker
Breaks down to build up
Shape the woman
Worthy partner
As his stature grew
Je suis qui je suis (I am who I am)
I would plaintively
And weakly remind
Quid pro quo serpent lick
With each fuck
He gets one wish
And yes
Pathetic me
Sayeth yes and yes and yes
How could I
I could and I did
Say *I do*
In the *Chapel of St. James*
At the *Cathedral of St. John*
Bitter pill to swallow
Worse to acknowledge
At this poignant intersection
Of life and death
I ask and ask
How could I have
Didn't know to run
Vile man stud man
Cock sure man cock
Promised myself
To a pimp
Missed all cues
Got used up
Laughed at my age
Old lady
Sagging jaw line
Jagged jaw line
You are on the way down

I am on the way up
I was all of forty
Stud pimp
Mean mouth man
I am trying
To stop regretting you
Imagine I am seventy
Still hating you
Still hurt by you
Wasted hours wasted breath
Wasted mind and heart
Ugh! Still sting from
Your tongue-lashings
Your barbed words
Your shocking taunts
Demands outrageous really
Give me your money
I want all of your money
I am on the way up
You down
You walk wrong
You stink
You have no feminine wiles
I forbid you
From making marinara sauce (gravy)
How dare you
Serve this to me
Sacrosanct Sunday centerpiece
Family recounts doctor's visits
And making the gravy
At ritualized Sunday meals
Stud pimp
Self-promoter mediocre
Man chip on shoulder
Phony sadness
Poseur cipher (oldest son's apt description)
Fish too small and puny to keep
Yet I did
What was on my mind
He would save my youth
Awaken desire
Plump and saucy
Sexy woman passionate
Steps from frigidity and fearfulness
I would rise
From the ash

Of old intimidations
To a full womanly
Rosy *Rubenesque* glory
Prick bastard stud pimp
Love making machine
All artifice and promise
You don't make love
There is no love in you
Your narcissism is outsized
Even you should have
A dimmer view of you
He thinks he's Serpico
Our son says
Verging on
Heart's final beats
Need to break away
Your image your face
Your hurt
Broke my heart to bits
Can't repair itself
Despair just desert
Queasy to confront
That last drawn breaths
Spewing hatred and regret
Raging ranting unforgiving
This the destiny I charted
Need to blot erase
Enough of you pimp stud
I picked you
Wanted to be a girl
Tossed around
I wanted to be
A woman sexy sexual
Pounding desire
Lead to foundling poseur
A predatory *Talmudic* scholar
Phony and made-up
Preying on women, me
Ripe for any embrace
Enough dear heart
No more in this hour of seventy
In this hour of 70
Death lurks
Want to be free
Regretting you
Feeling hurt by you

Feeling appalled
I fell in with you
Oh god
How could I
How could I
And how can I
Settle into quiet remorse
Slayer or lover
You ate up the years
I let you have them
How could I
How can I
Die without
Reconciling
Choice with need
Kindness empathy
Weak kneed girl
Bit the bait
Of supplication
Of deceit
Gambled on love
Gamboled in
Garden of first spring
You hovered
I just lay there
Dumbfounded
Captured not captivated
You spoke
With mothers mean mouth
I responded
Thankfully never submitted
To the surgeon's knife
Jaw line in tact
Appropriately slack
The spell still unbroken
I cannot die
So angry and disappointed
So aggrieved so saddened
Squandered chance for love
Dud stud prick pimp
I chose you
Longing misguided
Self-scrutiny horror won't abate
Having to reconcile with this fate.

Naomi Barber 2011

I Get It Trying to Be Irrelevant

I get it
A vanishing point in time
Less an irritant
More resigned
Less a reminder
Of who I am
Where I am
Talk to me
I am vanishing
Go quietly
Not to rage
Less is more
They say
Less is all
The body changes
Memory slips
Moment-to-moment
No longer there
Recollections
Names moment's ripe
Slip off tongue
Licking vacated air
Nothing there to collect
Or recollect
Spittle is all
Vapors last longer
Time erases
Moment-to-moment
Flexing its hold
Strangle hold
Clenched fist
Fighter left
Thumb hold lax
Muscles loosen hold
It is all
You see the glint
Boring nothing left
Of interest here
Nothing worthwhile
Boring sludge
Stick in the mud
No run left

Just a pinch an ache
Sadness remembering
When swarming
Around my inner light
Hard sells to brief glances
Overwhelmed
Pot of honey
There was a time
Climbing over me
I brought the audience
Good seller
Advertisements for myself
Mailer was not alone
Greedy for approbation
The hunger never ebbed
Other's eyes brought me to light
Trying to get my sea legs
Sure-footed
To walk the plan
The final one
Just dip into the future
Unnoticed a vanishing point
Disappearing
No more sightings
No more of the possible
Left behind
Drifting off dreams
Seasoned leaves
Drifting off
Crumbly dried out
Ash to waste
Dreams residue
As thin as vapor
I see it
Not too far off
The point into which
I will fall
Disappear not here
Trying to contain myself
Hope busts up still
Like perennials
I refuse to let it bloom
Early April wind
I am coming
Still gnawing the longing
For all I did not do

For all the misplaced wishes
And not kept promises
And all the shortcomings
Tipping the scales
At nearly 70
How formidable how scary
How absolutely frightening
I am scared
By my own death
Coming and yet
I walk if on wobbly legs
To its end point
Lots did not happen for me
Lots did
But let the chips fall
Where they may
My life was eerily empty
So much I didn't chose
So much I could have
It was within reach
A happy marriage
My children
Were born from expedience
And an unexplored heart
Can't keep going over
The same territory
My imagination is getting
Closed off from me
Sitting in the sidelines of bars
Watching life go on
As it will without me
Dusting off the fading image
The girl I was
The face facing me
Repulses can hardly
Look back, staring off
I could go on
But no use
Like Becket says
I go on
Vanishing into time and space
To the end of time
My time *my time of day* (Frank Sinatra)
Sticks in my brain
When so little else stays
Moments ago eons

Decades dismembered
Unremembered
Becoming irrelevant
My children
Will remember me
As they wish
My death comes
I feel it gnawing at me
I feel its rumble
Inching toward me
Eyes dimming
Step falters
Face averts other's eyes
I have not
Emptied all rage
And disappointment
At what was half-lived
Drinking a dirty martini on the rocks
Lots of olives please
I am replacing myself
I pick a designee my daughter
Live on more gallantly more truthfully
More adventuresome
Let your creativity erupt
Disciplined page upon page
Become Virginia Woolf's missing daughter
Be everything I was not
Quiet the night
Dying goes right
In the dark
I am no longer myself
I am down to raw bone
I am down to bare-knuckle truths
Longing won't bring back
Time is gone
Moments missed
Remain missed lost
The mirror holds a face
I can't the sight of
The death mask
Firmly in place
Time vanishes
There is no place for the old
Natures gruff and ruin
Time's sword slicing
Underbrush to woo

Time evaporates
A vanishing point
I scuttle the trail
Hoping anew
To lay down
In the thicket and thorn
As supple and willing
As the day I was born
Post-traumatic stress disorder
Shivers up spine
Eruption brewing
Breath bated
Wait anxiously
Insides spill hot
Hot lava
Unnerves
Splatters
Heat for flight
Starts in groin
Heart springs
Taut searing
Tears fabric of life
Of promises of vows
Was there ever
Love
What is it
Explosive
Traumatic
I shudder
In the wake
In the aftermath
At 70
A girl
Eruptions
Heat
Spilled over
Young life
A heart dies
Stiffens
Rebukes
Still to shudder
Inking
Sacrifice to fear
In the end
Love was too frightening.

Naomi Barber – 2010

Oblivion

That is what a writer should do: exert a keen ear and a bold heart to spill his characters' secrets. Joshua Mohr, writing a review about James Franco, Palo Alto.

already I am someone he could not have imagined –Joyce Carol Oates, Sourland

Question: *How do you feel about the aging process?*

Answer (Woody Allen): *Well, I'm against it. I think it has nothing to recommend it. You don't gain any wisdom as the years go by. You fall apart, is what happens. People try and put a nice varnish on it, and say, well, you mellow. You come to understand life and accept things. But you'd trade all of that for being 35 again. I've experienced that thing where you wake up in the middle of the night and start to think about your own mortality and envision it, and it gives you a little shiver. (Woody Allen age, 74)*

There is nothing left. He just looks like kitty litter. (Joyce Brabner wife of Harvey Pekar)
I never could stay happy for too long. (Harvey Pekar)

*At some point you're going to have to come to terms with who you are,
However unpleasant, if you're going to be anything at all. (Anita Brookner)*

Pleasant enough day out there...every morning it's not actually raining fire. (Paul Murray Skippy Dies)

*There is something beyond freedom that people need: work, love, belief in something,
commitment to something. Freedom is not enough. It's necessary but not sufficient.
It's what you do with freedom – what you give it up for – that matters." (Lev Grossman, comments on Jonathan Franzen's book title, Freedom.)*

*The problem is to keep the monkey mind from running
Off into all kinds of thoughts...
I know if I rest, I'll slide downhill fast. (Lee Kuan Yew – Singapore)
Prime Minister of Singapore- Republic of Singapore 1959 – 1990*

For me having a family is a crucial, life-saving antidote to show business, he said – Oliver Platt –

*The stuff of quotes affirm, not my words but resonate – not the part of fiction –
Dimensions affirmation all in the pursuit of inner truths and inner peace –
Or whew! I am not crazy - naomi*

What do we do with what we've been given?(Dani Shapiro – review of Half a Life Darin Strauss)

Always let men you're in relationships with have all the power; it's when they lose power and get insecure that your problems start. (Porochista Khakpour, My Nine years as a Middle-Eastern American)

When he, my first husband said, I know who you are you are the State of Israel, is when my therapist said, now you've got to go to run to the hills, leave! naomi

Post note:

*Now I know who you are: You are the state of Israel! And so began my flight in true sense of the word from my first marriage, leaving a home intact as if I had either
Not been there or left –as I stepped out – murderous rage, threats, and the gun came out – take everything from me and I will throw you under the bus or toss you out of the window or some other miserable death and pre-meditated murder – end of marriage number one – sadly didn't learn message well enough – power female power ended marriage two as well – put on a pedestal and then became to him a towering Amazon went on to hear how terrible how unfeminine I was – throwing rotten tomatoes or raw eggs or a discus right in my face cracking apart what was left of my building up – smashed to smithereens no longer love a possibility – not even a dream -*

I am on my way to oblivion
Death's sniffing around me
I can feel its coldness
I can feel its hot breath
It's steals into sleep
Rocks me awake
Is this the day
Will it strike
Heart or lungs
Will a trickle of pee
Escape my bladder
Incontinent and unable
To stem tides of excretions

Press on your public bone
When you pea she instructed
My mother mastered
Geriatric bodily decline
Its biology physiognomy
So cold so anatomical
Death came to her
A clinical phenomenon
Hospice palliative care
Metered infusions of illegal drugs
Colloquial assisted suicide
Last breaths sputtered out
A guttural tympanic roll
Ends in gagging goggling gasping
Final words about character not truth

I am on my way to oblivion
Fear a messy end
Death brings into sharp focus
An old sheepskin
On a Hogan's desert floor
I was brave or braver then
I was coming into myself
I knew to stay out West
I screamed out
Fury punched up
Against the sky
The stars the dark stillness
An Albuquerque night
I folded up
Like a circus tent
Went home left

The *momma* in the Hogan
She from whom my love comes (Naomi 1970)

Married some six weeks later
To a man I didn't then know
Who knew me little or not at all
Soon he dragged me off
To a dark closed-in
Swiss mountain Alpine village
Held silent and captive
Caught a new wife
I lived a covenant
Of my own making
I was twenty-three
Vows of silence
Slow walks on mountain trails
Farm wives to succor me
Kirshwasser and cello
Mindless mediocre
Bowing senselessly endlessly
Hours flicked off good days short
He took me off monthly to Zurich
Quieted down
But not gone mad insane
He knew better

I am on my way to oblivion
Collages newsprint quotes
Affirmation sought
New York Times
The New Yorker
Subway signs
Anywhere
Catches my eye
My heart
Stakes out a place
Words snippets
Armor
Affirmation
Jingles
Jangles
Words
Relief
Against
Which I stand
Know me

Clippings
Snippets
Show me
Who I am
In fact am

*gmar chatima tova- may you be written in the Book of Life for good(Sam Kestenbaum,
NY Times Sept 18, 2010*

Our mother (my brother's and mine)

Loved

The High Holidays

The songs

The music

The words

Which she

Lip-synched

Never knew

How to read

A word

Of Hebrew

Spent youth

Eschewing

Everything

Absolutely everything

Jewish

She did love the

High Holidays

Dumping sins from her pocket

L'shana tova tikatev v'taihatem"

For a good and sweet life

High holidays

She brought her grandchildren

Honey cake to dip in honey

To a good and sweet life

She sang Yiddish songs

Dancing and humming

Celebrating what she spent

The rest of the year despising

Exquisite torment

Head beats tantrums

Gongs Japanese tympani

I still quake

I still taste bitter crumbs

Of honey cake

L'shana tova

Ashes tossed into ocean
Dead bobbing mother
Ocean waves never sweet
Always the taste of salt and silt

I am on my way to oblivion
Trying to turn the earth of
My entrenched hatred for you
I cannot forgive you or myself
L'shana tova L'shana tova
Taking in the day
The sun leaves the sky
With a swirl of purples and reds
Sleeping through a night
Waking with sunrise
To begin again
Drenched with death
Again to taking a breath
Again alive still breathing
Tish A'bov, Good Yuntive

I am on my way to oblivion
Yom Kippur comes this year
Without your hum and song
Without honey cake
To dip into honey
Good Yuntive good-bye
Still you haunt nearly
Every minute of my life
I can't get rid of you
Empty my pockets of you
I mourn for you and myself
Deadened by your twisting hand
At twenty-two
You living to ninety-two

I am on my way to oblivion
I am seventy
Avinu Malkeinu (Our Father, Our King)
Lost my moment
In the *Garden of Eden*
Cast a cold eye
On death impartial
Shadows spark a day
Clouds gather disperse
Remembering her

Shapes and reshapes
Is it me I recast
Remembering

Our father our king
As good as she was bad
He had us thinking
He abandoned us solitary scared
For his magnificent obsession
Our mother
Whip switch witch
S and M mistress
In one breath
A caught throat
In rapture and sorrow
Loves lambent ways
Loves errant ways
She sorcerer and lure
Love baited and torn
Our bodies bled
Our eyes steadfast
Feasting on our family
Our tormenting repast

I am on the way to oblivion
Clouds rush off
Brisk wind
In early fall
Don't have the stamina
The will to live really live
Mocked by time
Evanescent evaporating
Alive by half-step
Half measure
If love if love
I would turn a back run
I can feel the falter
The blood pressure rise
Oblivion not far off
Weary weary
No one holding me
As if second skin
No one breathing
Sweetening the air
No one with whom to share
No one there

No matter how much
I practiced being alone
Needing no one
Still the chill between
The wing blades
Of shoulder and rib
It hurts
Prophesized
I would be alone
When I was eleven
Is that why
At seventy
Death somewhere very near
Overflowing with sorrow
Solitary girl solitary death
Reconciled not yet
Resigned not quite
I was not a good host for love
And yet and yet I was I was

Naomi Barber

...concentrates on the characters of people she loves. Chief among these is her mild-mannered, long-suffering, scholarly German Jewish father. Eventually, she comes to realize that he has been a willing accomplice to his more flamboyant spouse, enjoying "the tumult Mom created." And Reichl discovers that her father kept some secrets of his own... Tender at the Bone, Ruth Reichl Random House

Picking Among the Bones of the Past
(Inspired by *Nostalgia for the Light* - Chilean movie)

Feel the snap
The seethe
The rage
The heat
Despondency
Labyrinth stars
Constellations
Of scorn
Irrevocable sadness
Hard white transcribers
I did you wrong
Fiercely lit
Moon warns
Follow the cupping gourd
Beyond anguish
A certain freedom lives
Stars refute
Beyond grief
Error
Foot faults
Missteps
Wrong turns
Roads not chosen
The seeded sky
Holds renewal
Relinquish release
The narrative
I did not kill
Your chance
For true love
I don't have
That kind of power

Vanquished love
Squandered love
Youthful invincibility
I know
If not now I'll get him
Sometime in the future
What ever happened to?
I now ask *Google*
True love squandered

Does not come again
Glittery starlight
Dreams of heartbreak
Hack into night upon night

My son
She found you a weak sapling
You don't belong with her
She is hard wired
You are not
She sniffed around
Caught your desperation
A terrible touch bottom time
It took only two months
To steal into your life
Precedent set
Your father and I
Married in three weeks
Her backward glance
Keeps her steady
Coldness hardness
Keep her safe
She will kill you off
If you dare break
Or try to breach
The threaded narrative
Childhood horror story
A solitary vouchsafed keepsake

A glimpsing smile
A quivery lip
You keep the memory
Drinking sweet mother's milk
She was not raised
On such a rich brew
In our lives
Bitterness spilled in
Love broke apart
Bitter milk severed smiles
She danced to escape
Breaking the tyranny
Survival her childhood
Daily bread
But love does not grow
In such a heart
Steps from paralysis

Go out and find love again
You can handle happiness
She reads you wrong
Magical powers to transform
Her coldness is fixed
Beneath the glacial distance
More ice than warmth

Picking the
The bones
Of the past
Stumbling
On truths
Glistening shards
Shreds evidence
Blown about
Shaped and reshaped
Undulating recast
Forces greater
And less illusive
Than memory
Dreams exist
In such a landscape
Formations
Heaving and receding
Nature's force
Blown about
Indifferent to will
Shapes erratic
Ecstatic static
Bent upon
Unearthing
These truths
Eyes avert
Return
Archival site
Excavate dig

Squatter in squandered time
Resisting the pull to end life
Defiant in moon's sweep
Death's scythe closes in
I am ready to die
No longer
Girl toying with suicide
Now with a body

In heaving decline
Gazing at anarchic time
Seventy years
Now to scrub the earth
Sift through
The hours the days
Illusory at best
Distortions
The heat of truth
Too great
Revelations
Compromises
I pore over
The past
Rubble shards
Shattered glass
Broken disjointed
Configurations
Of our collective lives
Hear the din of *Holocaust*
Elliptical echoes
We weren't incinerated
But the residue
The stench
Found its way
Infiltrated
The weight of history
Bequeathed its breadth
My mother your grandmother
So distractedly morbidly
Ashamed of her life
Of being alive
Rapacious hungers
Insatiable cravings
Childlike grandiosity
Crazed smallness
She looked at our faces
Father's brother's mine
Shucking ripping away
At our very essence
Kept her mad and sane
Our being alive
Victimization
A long habit in the making

Arable decimated
Anguish sorrowful
I see your face
I caused that
Terror sweats
Pain juts
Through my bones
My legs cramp
Agony chill
What is beyond remorse?
I held your first cry
Your mouth suckled
The yielding sweetness
Of my milk
Fear bridled me
I cannot breathe
In your house
Night times
Frighten me
Sadness stains
Streaks the sky
Moon radiates pain
Hurt metastasized
Cowardly choices
To appease
I see smiles taut
Laughter choked
Like a shattered bat
Better to be sad
Better to be beaten down
Than to cage a heart
Crazy restraint
Winds rhythms beat
A slow death
Waiting for a better day
If only and tomorrow
Time moved beyond
Feigned stoicism
Rots to regret

I hack into cold stone
Cut into bone width
Deep into marrow
The sorrow
Deeper than bone and breath
We couldn't get love right

Fled tyrants and murderers
Becoming hostage
Of our own flight
We must be able
To crossover
Move beyond
Futility taking
Uncertain steps
Toward possibility
Unforgiving galaxy
Calcium deposits
Star to bone
Connect us
Sadness weighs
Greater than my death
I implode with nausea

Picking among
The bones of the past
The ruins
The whispers
The echoes *Holocaust*
Failed dreams
Passions stilled
Rapacious unsettling
I am the mother
Picking among the ruins
Your unhappiness
Scorching
Like the *Atacama Desert*
In *Chile* where widows
Dig the remains
Of the disappeared
An arc of affinity here
Your house haunts me
A riff of incompleteness
My adult children
Sink into weirdness
An abject synchronicity
Despairing
They grieve for love
The hot breathe of passion
Craving love
Blindly, hotly, madly (Swann's Way, Proust)
Beyond promise and commitment

Harbinger of hurt lives
Deep in the marrow
Deep in the sunset
The skies purples and oranges
A heart yields
Beyond the smiles
Beyond the warm embrace
As sure as springtime
Legacies of birth and death
I see the ebbing
My time nearly over
The epic the design
The meaning
Stalled with me
Open your hearts
Discard me
My imprint on your lives
Dispose of our terrible history
Flutter and soar
Watch a *wading egret*
Reflection caught
It is not death
The sun waits
The sky is bold
Life is forgiving
Pick up
Where I left off
Fall in love
Ruthlessly chillingly
Blindly, hotly, madly
We have not travelled this far
The heart still waits
For that irrevocable
Inevitable blistering smile
To cross your face
For your heart to skip beats
As you run toward love
Exhuming finally the past
Words chromatic
Dualities split off
Essential selves
Find springtime renewal
Other chances if egregious
Exist beyond the broken promise

Naomi Barber 2011

This is the Way Death Begins

This is the way death begins
Bold reckless
Entering me
An aura a whiff
A threat
Keeps me on my feet
But death here we are
Face-to-face
I am breaking down
To elemental parts
Sad eyed
As my father
Vanishing into mist
Nimbus cloud
Wind-ripped gushing
I am running
Out of time
Blow back
Of ash and welt
I am ready
To disappear
Into nowhere
Bleak this death drama
No bright spots
Death lurking
The where and what of it
Off putting
Words escape
Confession absolution
Odd for a dying Jew
My heart pours out
Why and *why not*
Cows in fields chewing
And spewing cud
Ruminant and regurgitate
Questions past answering
Regret quicksand
Upending foothold
I was twenty-two
When I promised myself
To him three weeks
After a midnight coffee
I will marry you he said

Without equivocation
Good I said and did
My oldest children have
Copycat loveless marriages
Disingenuous promises
Wrote marriage vows
Divorce overshadows
Chance for redemption
Nothing here to mimic
Nothing to emulate
Unresolved
Unruly rage and hatred
Affixed on divorce papers
The utter chill
Of a loveless marital bed
Never so alone
Sleeping next to him
In our marriage bed (Naomi '70's)
Cheat I told my daughter
She didn't need my permission
How enlightened of your mother
Her friend tells her
Who is extravagantly rich
And can cheat and set
Up the terms
The architecture
For separate lives
My daughter
Is she ready to starve?
To work two jobs
Don't want to know
The end of this story

Chickens claw peck
Chicken neck
Apt metaphor
Life drawing
To an inglorious finish
I am ready to go beyond
The breaking of the dawn
The final sunset
I wait I wait
The truth of it is
The truth of it is
The truth is
I am more gone

Than here
Mourning my loss
I live in shadows
My mind losing its grip
Sad girl lost girl
Knowing for sure
Only that you held me
In your talons mother
And I never struggled loose

Naomi Barber

“the artist should make a romantic stab at the world and either cut his way or die trying.” James Franco

Palimpsest

Certain Death
It is there
Certain death
Time winnows wriggles
Squeezes
Moves out of me
I can feel it leave

My heart frightened
Love beyond sight lines
Can't hack into the past
Can't take back time
Same me old now
Still blind scared
Love inanimate
Plants flowers trees birds
And babies yes babies

No sadness no regret
Soon but not yet
Death

Palimpsest Prologue

Omi your arms are mushy - jiggle - Willa granddaughter age five

Oh god -they are spongy forearms - (Lorna Wyckoff My Brothers Keeper) - NY Times Aug 22, 2010

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An aura a whiff
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Knowing for sure
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In your talons mother
And I never struggled loose

"the artist should make a romantic stab at the world and either cut his way or die trying." James Franco

Palimpsest Canvas

Thick paint
Memory clogged
Layers of shame and hurt
Thick blanket of pain
Art restoration

Scraping off
Layers
Veneers of stories
Justifications denials
First touch of brush
That day that moment
This Palimpsest
These sketches
Revision
Time abundant
Can't count on time now
This version will stick
When the outer layers
Of pigment are scraped off

Palimpsest 1

Choked with unabated rage
The birth of torment
And revenge
Against the Nazis
Against being poor
Against being Jewish
Caught on the snaggletooth
Of their combat
My parents my family
To push them off away
At age ten
No longer called them
Mother and father
Mom or Dad
Mommy or Daddy
Just Belle and Bill
The distance the relief
Created strangers aliens
Renamed to ease the pain
Living among strangers
Insulated thus I fooled myself
Hostage to demented frenzy
Parents polarized pulled apart
Forming the earliest stirrings
Of my heart

Palimpsest 2

Fuck you fuck you
Guttersnipe
Goldilocks curls
Jewish hair
She tugged on
Incessantly to get straight
Fuck you fuck you
Guttersnipe
As she vacuumed
As she did often
Cleanliness
An obsession
I waved my
Fuck you finger
Wildly in the air
Right at and behind
Her back
Like grass lands
Tree benders
Blasts of
Torpedo winds
Fuck you fuck you
She never knew
Guttersnipe
Word picked up
At five or six
Didn't know
What it meant
But had a sense
It was lethal
Finally
After listening
To her berate
Her mother my grandmother
Castigating spewing hatred
Drum roll thick
Grandma queer strange
Imperiled assimilation
Her curdling Yiddish accent
I shrieked sob spitting
You are a guttersnipe
You are a guttersnipe
My mother gasped
Chased me

Chastening a six-year-old
Mouth split open to wash out
Those words
Archery lances
More desperate
More defiant
Mother blotted out
The old country as if she
A found baby swaddled
Astride the Hudson River
Crazed hand washing
A girl with no past
Politically correct
Off balance always
Search for assimilation
Too life defining desperate
Attempts to kill off her mother
Each phone call
To erase telltale traces
Of the old world of *Silesia*
Unkempt meant revelation
Emanating telltale
Vapors lifting off swamp rot
Ears splitting to frenzy
Guttersnipe guttersnipe
I spit out
To protect her prayerful
Sabbath observant mother
A baker of Challah breads
Who held me close
Did she know
How I deflected
Poison arrow words
From her daughter
Her thick hand
On my head
Buried in her
Floury lap told me so

Palimpsest 3

Convoy coming
Train running
On the track
It is midnight
I keep watch
At the foot
Of my parents
Mahogany bedstead
The Nazis will
Not get them
I was younger than five
I kept them
In there bed alive
The train whistled
Never stopping
Passing Newark NJ
Straight by

Palimpsest 4

this suicide thing (Bob Dylan)

Smoked smoked
Cigarettes
From thirteen on
Friend Susan's
House filled with
Smokers
And Judaism
And money
And maids
And laughter
And intent eyes
And baking brownies
I smoked with them
At their house
They suspected
I was a fugitive
From down
The street
From a kind
Of tyranny
That happens
Behind drawn shades

They knew
I smoked cigarettes
My father choked
On the thought
He knew
Smoking brought
Cancer and left me
Article after article
Foredooming
My cigarette smoking
I blew cigarette rings
Romantic down and out
French poet
I welcomed
The death threats
The romance
The degradation
I smoked
Happily
For the doom
And the despair
A brilliant
Act of defiance
Rebellion
My body my own
My mouth sucked in hard
I smoked Galois
I smoked Camels
I smoked Pall-Mall's
As time went on
I read *Mallarme*
Who smoked
Or was it *Proust*
It was my
Magnificent obsession
Paused only
To have babies and nurse

Palimpsest 5

Went to work fulltime
In my early thirties
Children two and five
Inner turbulence instructed
My feet to start the journey out
Married in three weeks

Worn down to the nub
Any fight left got me out the door
Answered an ad in *Sunday's Times*
Vague open-ended position
Dawn of decentralization 1971
Superintendent wanted to get his hands
In earnest on the schools
And as the football coach he was
And ex-Marine travelling solo in Japan
Planned plays strategies to break open
And apart what existed
Here a big show demonstration
How things could be different
Enticing and open-ended suited me
Showed up for work in studied
Business attire edgy bohemian
Rebel rabble-rouser off-putting
Attire beat back establishment
Fearful of Mohammed Ali handshake
Jewish vanguard in flank
Cover your ass don't make waves
Turbulence and trouble
She not the *Jew of pogrom*
Defiant unwilling to blend in
Inquiring quizzical they
Blushing choking eyeing me
As if an enemy infiltrated
Their rock solid loyalist flank
Casting a wary eye
I saw they were the folks
The relatives the *Mishpucha*
Around my family's *Seder* table
I anomalous and disconcerting
Eyed with suspicion and dread
As the *Bruchas* were spoken read
At what next what politics
What issue not in the *Haggadah*
Read off the text
And yet the *Haggadah*
Was a riff on rebellion resistance disobedience
The fifth question the fifth *Koshas* (question)
There are actually four
Will the real Jew please stand up (Naomi)
Will the real slim shady please stand up (Eminem)
Blushing choking on the curled
Nearly balletic rings of smoke

Entering a school building I lit up
(It was the '70's with no formal restrictions)
Smoking scrim infiltrating
Flagrant disregard
Twisting my mouth to exhale
Entering classrooms
Cigarette dangling flicking
Ashes in receptacles here and there
The cigarette the bohemian attire
Part recruitment tool for the
Disparaged and disenchanting
Teachers choosing classrooms
Over battlefields in Viet Nam
Consciences peeked at the virulent
Openly expressed flagrant disregard
For the students disadvantaged and of color
The level of disregard for the students
Heated the hearts stirred them
Into an advocacy for social justice and equity
These the brimming over I caught
With an invitation to fight back
To disrupt and *reform public education*
I smoked to lure and seduce talented teachers
Who themselves as cars peeled off
In parking lots lit up their *weed*
Generational affinities pot and cigarette
We gathered around idealism and rage
We made joint declarations to rescue
Kids from the predatory hands
Of the old guard
Still embittered and embattled
By the uprisings in the late '60's
Union loyalists tried and true and *Jew*
Organized against grassroots blacks
I smoked *Pall Mall Galois Camels*
Gathering up a teaching flock
Cigarettes and coffee
Cigarettes and rebellion
Cigarettes and resistance
In France and in the Bronx
Blowing smoke rings
Beginning a forty year battle
For a better world for kids
Better schools better teachers
Cigarette ash and *Galois*
And dressed to kill

Forged a path beyond *Seder* table
And the generic Jewish family
To fight the Jewish way
Tikkun Olam (repairing the world)
Did in the end form the core
For a very personal cause and war

Palimpsest 5

All the while in my mind
I was the girl
In the haystack
Wind winding in and out
My wild unruly curls
I ate apples
Two a day
And walked barefoot in mud
And danced without
Umbrellas in the rain
I was not the girl who smoked
I was another
I was displaced
Misplaced
Misbegotten
Have the lungs
Renewed and forgotten
I am the girl
Of the untamed countryside
Fresh and clean
And stingingly alive
I am *Julie Andrews* on the hills
Of Switzerland
My mouth
Filled with smoke
And blowing smoke rings
This my certain road
Path to suicide
I quit at thirty-nine and
At seventy am still alive

Palimpsest 6

I was the daughter
Of a *Fabian Socialist*
Who at five
Refused to remove
Her winter coat
In kindergarten
Reason
The man who
Makes the coats
Has not a coat
For his own children
I had coats galore
We all had coats galore
And then more
And through a lifetime
Of children
And grandchildren
The coats came
Avalanching each winter
And anticipating
Each season
Spring coats winter coats
In-between coats
They were picked out
They were particular
Each had a story
Of a sale and
What they are all wearing
And fur coats
Although disparaged
Were purchased
Almost by the pelt
Worn only
In the company
Of the mink set
Primarily cousins
Diamond and mink clad
At some family
Usually synagogue related event
Not to witness
We were often excluded
The Fabian socialist
My coat-crazed mother
Depression baby

Making up
For having
To go thread bare
In hand-me-downs
Childhood winter times
This as a backdrop
For the winters
Of my discontent
At eighteen
I just went coatless
For an entire winter
Defiantly surly rebellious
Not a coat worn outside
Revenge for the fiasco
Of the blood red coat
Shopping meant in tandem
She foisting clothes
I would have to buy
This time with money earned
Working stooped shoulder
In a bargain clothing store
I bought by myself
On sale
A fabulous fitted
Fierce red winter coat
It had the exquisite
Tailoring of couture
I walked in
Tried on the coat
And the fire was lit
You are a whore
A prostitute
Tasteless
You cannot
Walk out of the house
In that
Only trash wears that
And with that
She pulled it off me
And tossed it out
Or so I thought
Like many mad people
Blowing off
Her memory erased
Blotted out
Frequent episodes

Of explosive behavior
Wintertime the following year
And what should appear
My mother in that coat
Or a close facsimile
Even the same distinctive buttons
She didn't recall
That I had bought
One just like it or it
And that she had gone
On a viral rampage
I foreswore off coats
That wintertime
Suicidal thoughts held off
By the cold storage
Of this rebellious act
At her death we found
Her coats lined up like soldiers
Scarves and matching hats
Ready to be plucked
From her closet
And about which
She could recount
When she bought it
And for how much
And how long she had had it
And that although
By a famous designer
She bought it off the rack
Hoard hauls many more
Coats than a Goodwill store
Looking back I know
Traumas last don't pass
Coatless I tolerated the cold
Better far better than the chill
Life in the perpetual conditional
And the castigating
And the recriminations
And the reincarnated red coat
Subsequent generations
Lives beyond ours
Anger hatred rage
Live in perpetuity
Balanced hopefully
With joyful reminiscence
Will my children have

Wells of relief beyond
The resentments and rage
Or will forgiveness as with me
Find no rightful place

Palimpsest 7

Three husky high school
Friends carried
The sousaphone
Onto the stage
At Weequahic High School
In Newark New Jersey
Famous for being
The point of departure
In Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*
Recounting the enormous distance
And travails to travel to the suburbs
From Newark where a girl
Waited seductively diaphragm in drawer
Now not so many years
After Philip Roth graduated from Weequahic
I was running for student council office
For *OBA* Vice President (Orange and Brown Association school colors)
The time came for campaign oratory
And as I got to the lectern
The hulking football players
Placed a sousaphone
Just over my shoulder
Advised by my musician father
Not even to peek at it or
The campaign could be jinxed lost
Referencing the dreadful glance back
When *Orpheus* lost his *Eurydice*
Taking to heart this literary warning
Deadpan as a Marx Brother
I began my well-crafted speech
My Dad my chief and sole political strategist
And this was not the only tickler
Devised to bring in the vote for weeks
There were posters everywhere
Simply stating *Nibs Because* (nickname)
In those self-conscious days
Of menstruation ads for a sanitary product
Read *Modess Because*
Giggles and blushes filling hallways

And if that were not sufficient
I donned a crown
Known in the school as Nibs
As in *Her Nibs Miss Georgia Gibbs*
A nickname given at birth
He and my mother agreed to Nancy
After her brother Nathan
And conforming to Jewish naming
In her labor room anguish and pain
Comforted and brought through it
By nurse Naomi there it was Naomi
As with anything biblical in particular
That could be construed as Jewish
His stomach turned like clotted cheese
So I became Nibs or Her Nibs
Until I turned twenty-one
At which time my first lover
Did not find it suitable for an *Amorosa*
But back to my junior year
Ready at the lectern crown in place
Poster affixed sousaphone just to the right
I began the room rustling with suppressed laughter
Finishing with the following words
As clear as if yesterday and sung acappella

*Nibsie with her brown hair
And brown eyes so bright and gay
Nibs for OBA (Orange and Brown Association)
I sing this song
Even though I can't sing a note
Cause I want your vote, cause I want your vote
So remember when you're voting on the 27th of May
To vote for Nibs Weiss, Her Nibs for OBA*

Needless to say
I won by a landslide vote
Thanks to strategist father
And grit at sixteen
Grit gone lost
In my early twenties
Or soon after I married and had kids
When my husband travelled which he did frequently
I would reemerge rambunctious playful a silly Momma

(Note:... you were on the public speaking team, and in student government and on the newspaper. You had power... this about Alexandra Robbins from fellow classmate.
Popularity is a combination of visibility, influence and recognizability. (Quote: Alexandra Robbins)

Palimpsest 8

At the time of the election to *OBA*
I was the editorial page editor
Of the student newspaper
The *Weequahic Calumet*
Editorials throwing
The principal into a frenzy
Caught in the crosshairs
Between freedom of speech
The first amendment
And in incautious student
Throwing up controversial
And problematic issues
As in the great *tracking* divide
High performing Jews (mostly or all)
In an honors *track* (*high level potent Ivy bound curriculum*)
Blue color mostly Italians
Stuck in a very pedantic basic and ordinary curriculum
And then on the other side of the tracks
Black students who made up thirty-five percent of the population
Were relegated or assigned
To take almost completely shop or secretarial classes
Exposing this inequity not realizing fully
What a tender spot upon which I pressed
For I was one of the *fabulous twenty*
Honors students given overinflated privileges
Pardons for wrongs or missteps
Ivy bound we gave the school
Panache cache we were the Jews
Who didn't move out kept real estate viable
In a distant decade neighboring *Clinton Hill*
Was aflame with wild marauding and fierce riots
Forty years later the class of 1958
Became the subject of an anthropological study
New Jersey Dreaming by a *MacArthur* winning
Anthropologist classmate Sherrie Ortner
One acute finding Blacks died off younger
At a faster proportionate rate
Portentous a prayer and a prophesy
And a dead-ended apartheid curriculum
Of the miraculous twenty

One a doctor severely impaired Alzheimer victim
The *tracks* still not easily crossed today
Borders stiffly drawn
Existential nausea and melancholia and a reckoning
Polished up children crossing borders
Leaving their homes for a better world
Not yet in the Bronx not in Brooklyn
Not in urban public schools not hardly anywhere

Palimpsest 9

When in the ninth grade
I was invited to join
The local youth chapter of the *NAACP*
Among the very few whites
If *Jewish* counts as white
I had written a letter
To the *Newark Evening News*
Which appeared on the front page
Threatening to hand in my American citizenship
If this America was the kind of place
That could do such an egregious
And terrible injustice to Emmett Till
We were the same age
His court trial struck such a plaintive chord
And dissonance within me
After the letter appeared
The *NAACP* invited me to join
As did the teacher advisor of the *Calumet*
Ask me to join the staff
Fearless outspoken then
Question?
How did a lonely girl living
With the tyranny of an
Outrageous crazed mother
Raging mother
And a shushing father
Live in those realms
And feel in public spaces so safe
Father supported my school life
As much as he cowered
When she bellowed and ranted
In our house behind the shut blinds
The cavern of our family demise

Palimpsest 10

Fat Ugly Stupid

And ominously suicidal
Was what I told him
The psychiatrist at Mass General
This flight from Antioch
Legitimized because I was
Running from Peter
From John from myself
I would have flunked out
I was not in truth
College material
Time spent scheming
To stay afloat to stay credible
To be someone who functioned
Well enough to stay sanguine
With parents and wildly achieving
Children of friends always held up
At college I was wilting dying inside
Although I did fall love at first sight
With John army fatigue jacket cowboy boots
Blond curls blue eyes haystack guy
None like him in Newark at Weequahic High
As close to Paul Newman Robert Redford
As I would come
He was in love with Susan
But did flash a generous come-on smile
My way just in case Susan bolted
Which she did and I was there
To pick up the pieces
Which I did
Before I dropped them
Big time hurtful time
Life bending
Life scarring time
Let slip through
Crazy quilt fingers
The love of my life
Father guided the process
Ghost writing the *Dear John* letter...

And then there was Karm
Karma Lee she too a blond
With brilliant blue eyes
A finely chiseled Nordic face
I flip flopped for her
Love at first sight
Twice I was eighteen
Crazy difference
Between high school crush
And obsession and real love
She and I on our second-hand bikes
Rode into the farmland
Just outside Xenia Ohio
And lay in the newly
Ploughed fields
Talking about Camus
We lay close
Our breath in perfect
Resonance and beat
I was a league
From knowing
She longed for me
To make love with me
I still didn't quite know
What a diaphragm was
Although I had heaving dreams
Of love and had been
Relatively easy
With teenage passion
Restraint not pressing on me
As in *Splendor in the Grass*
I liked necking and could have
Gone all the way
Without even knowing I did
So in college I fell in love
At *first sight* twice
I backed John into *The Berlin Wall*
Like a pressed flower into scrapbook
When he was called back
Into service I wrote
A contrite *Dear John* letter
When he needed me most
My father dictating the contents
Screaming for independence
Fearful of severing connection
Father center of life

John could not win in this contest
I have lived to regret it

Believe it or not
Given a second chance
John chose not me but a woman
Who liked who enjoyed
Sex being sexual
Their relationship soared nighttimes
Just when my marriage would die
Back with John a decade later
He the man who first loved me
In a decade the sexuality knocked out of me
Although I dressed sexy
Ms. Tough Titties he observed
I was numb dead spiritless fire gone
One look in my eyes said it all
If before I could be on fire as wife
Now I could set tables well
He warned me to get out
Of my marriage
Presumptuous as that sounds
He rescued eyesight and truths
Brought them into focus and light
He will blow off all of your heads
Surreptitious visit I showed him
The loaded gun without a safety catch
In a rare book cut out holster
In the drawer just ajar next to
His side of the bed and then
He sat with me on the beds
Of my sleeping children
I never saw or heard from him again
As he left the apartment
Great risk taken though
My husband was in Germany
But he had a nose for those
Who trespassed his property
I got out
Thanks *Dear John*

Fat

The psychiatrist
Raised eyebrows
I was vanishing
Every day
Getting thinner
I had an undiagnosed
Weight loss disease
My mother at nineteen
Locked her jaws against food
Guess aversion to sustenance
Runs in the family
And men flocked after me
Men begged to photograph me
Needed abacus to tally suitors

And stupid

*You are the most brilliant
Student we have had here
In more than ten years
In the Clinical
Speech Pathology Program
At Boston University*
I had found a safe harbor here
Fantasy ambition
Poet cellist lover
Live in Europe
Influenced by
French woman
Who lived in the same
Boarding House on Irving Place
(William James had lived across the street)
Who spent days
Mollycoddling her very rich boyfriend
At Riggs mental institution
She my distinctive role model
Urging me on as she
Applied fresh
Ruby nail polish everyday
Crazy increasingly muted
Ambition spirited forward
Desire fire tamped down
Father's stomping feet
*Everyone woman needs
To pay her own way*
Early feminist he

Fearful that
I would escape his control
Never did

Fat Ugly Stupid

The unending mantra
That governed choice
And I didn't kill myself
And fattened up a bit
Multiple years later
In therapy to sever
Or find ways to stay
In my marriage
I spoke of the knife
I would plunge
Into my stomach my uterus
My sexuality
My suicide
I didn't die
I died spiritually instead

Palimpsest 11

Karma Lee committed suicide
Karma Lee left me some unsent love letters
Her mother dutifully packed and mailed off
Rife with passion for me
And devouring desire to make love to me
If I had known how different life
I loved her enough
To live with undetermined
Sexual orientation
John married
The woman to whom
He could make love
With each night
And I have been
Divorced twice
Dust collects on my cello
More artifact and art object
Poems reflections
Found audience in the Bronx
Set off all work-related projects
Couldn't stop myself from writing
And hiding the work in dust collecting boxes

Notebooks resurrected at times
Formed into manuscripts then re-hidden
Although at funerals and family events
Would with quivering hands would
Always commemorate with something written
Leading my mother to say *No poems at my funeral*
Honesty and rawness must emanate
I read Camus gripped
The bedrock of a first true love
Squandered back turned on
Love at first sight
And my response
Predictable quicksilver flight

Palimpsest Obituary Thumbnails: 12

Here lies a woman who functioned well
A bright normal
Scurrilous indictment
Grave filling disappointment
Quicksilver escapes
Fires within died at twenty-five
Loved children well
Broke a biblical spell
Drawn down
Never broke bonds
Parents held on tight
And I succumbed
Such was my life.
Scraping off
Layers
Veneers of stories
Justifications denials
First touch of brush
That day that moment
This Palimpsest
These sketches
Revision
Time abundant
Can't count on time now
This version will stick
When the outer layers
Of pigment are scraped off

Naomi Barber

Choreography for Death*

I pick over your death
As if it were succulent fruit
And I had not eaten
For as long as it takes
Legs to shrivel and stomachs to protrude
I mash mouthfuls of your death
Against my teeth, asking
Why? Why? Why?

Climbing aboard the morning bus
An anonymous commuter, as the
Crystal gray of dawn let go
Its hold to the sparkling innocence
A new day, unknown to itself
That it would be cracked
By the leaden weight of death
Yours. The lifting tongue drooling
With anticipation, the pills sucking
Up your juices, flowing more slowly
Your blood, little time remains
Lying down above bridge and bay
The day sparkles brightly you die

While I, you bitch, wait
For you. Your call saying
You were on your way
Aroused, remembering, awakened
To you, I waited, you bitch
You dead bitch, leaving me alerted
Starving for your arrival
Having now to digest your death.

Naomi Barber
1967

Correspondence - It could kill you...

*Karma Lee was best friendship at first sight on a stair well in the first weeks of college she the daughter of a psychiatrist in San Francisco and I from Newark New Jersey and the daughter of a music teacher and musician. We both transferred at the end of our second year but kept in close touch planning always a camping trip in the Redwoods. Karma Lee was to visit me in Philadelphia with my newborn son. About a year later, her mother sent me correspondence never mailed in which she attested to her love and unremitting sexual dreams for me.

Dear Nibs,

What started me thinking especially of you, Truth to tell, was that I had a homosexual dream, though perhaps "homosexual" is not the right word, in which we were making love. A beautiful dream - my mind is wide open to bisexuality at this point as I experienced vividly (a dream in the midst of an afternoon nap) the love our friendship but also experienced the greatest degree of sexual excitement I have ever known. Sex has continued to be a major block for me and the dream came as an exciting sign of growth with as wholesome a feeling to it as one could imagine.

*Love,
Karm
August 2, 1966*

Dear Nibs,

...she went to a very lovely spot apparently with sleeping pills and was not found until around 10 days later. Karm spoke of you a lot and very fondly. I know the loss you feel. I hope you and I will meet sometime.

*With love,
Michaela (Karm's mother)
March 6, 1997*

When I Die

*When I die, I want only women to handle me in the Chevra Kadisha
And do with my body as they pretty please: cleanse my ears of the last words
I heard, wipe my lips of the last words I said,
Erase the sights I saw from my eyes, smooth my brow of worries,
And fold my arms across my chest like the sleeves of a shirt after ironing.
And salve my flesh with perfumed oil to anoint me King of Death for a day
And arrange in my pelvic basin as in a fruit bowl
Testes and penis, navel and frizzy hair
Like an ornate still-life from some past century,
A very still life on a ground of dark velvet,
And tickle my mouth hole and asshole with a feather to check,
Is he still alive?
And laugh and cry by turns and administer a last massage
So it passes from their hands through me to the entire world
Till the End of Days.
And one of them will sing "God Full of Mercy,"
Will sing in a sweet voice "Merciful Womb,"
To remind God that mercy is born from the womb, true mercy,
True womb, true love, true grace.
Oh my life, that's what I want in my death, in my life, on my life.*

YEHUDA AMICHAI

Our Father's Last Days at Rose Cottage – William Meyer Weiss

When we brought our father (age 83) to Rose Cottage in Catskill, New York we were met by its host and *caregiver in chief* Sheila Evans and a medical representative from the local hospice of which we were to become apart. Grim news met us; our father would live but five days and possibly a week. Aside from his medically diagnosed forgetfulness, our father used a walker, was incontinent, and could hardly eat his tongue so swollen from an abundance of medicines. Our father was understandably frightened and depressed. He had to leave the home he loved and move to a strange place nearly one hundred-fifty miles from there. He had come full circle; his early twenties were spent summers in the Catskills playing bass fiddle at a variety of local hotels.

I had known about the *magical hands* of Sheila Evans first hand from friends and from social visits to the home she shared with guests (Rose Cottage). Having begged Sheila to invite my father to live at Rose Cottage, there we were. It is the last day of a particular year.

Seven days later, at a visit with our father there he was walking without a walker, no longer incontinent, not taking any medicines, and enjoying a lovely home-cooked meal with a glass of wine. In the moment he was clear and conversational, his wonderful sense of humor back. "Did I share that already?" he asked repeatedly aware of his short-circuited memory or of those frightening lapses. The hospice staff found this turn-around startling and amazing. Sheila Evans had brought our father back to life.

Three visits a week, we enjoyed conversation and old Marx Brother movies and delicious meals and good wines. Music filled Rose Cottage Celtic songs and Broadway musicals and then Bach and Beethoven and Mozart. Our father was a much beloved musician and music educator in New Jersey.

When our father had regained his stamina and his love of life, he decided on his own time, that he was ready to die. He shared this with the hospice staff and us. He only wanted to listen to Celtic songs and stopped eating and just let Sheila Evans minister soft liquids to his lips. Five days after he decided his life had come to an end, he died with Sheila Evans witnessing his last breaths and holding his hand.

"Death is our most important moment!" Sheila Evans would share with us. At Rose Cottage death becomes that for each guest.

Naomi Barber
Robert Weiss
June 9, 2010

Our Visit With Dad At Sheila's...Just Luca and Mom (Me)

March 9, 1998

A smile broke through like lavender
His face opaque
Newly lacquered over by death
His lower lip protruded and hung over
Like a drooping tit,
His eyes a gauzy, glaucoma glaze
His head flopped to one side
And then tucked itself on his chest
Like a preening bird
Dad, you are almost gone
Dementia, Alzheimer's, Strokes, Seizures
Who knows?
Can you help me get my memory back?
You requested
When asked what help you needed
Bach, I am listening to *Bach*
To prepare myself for your death
Dad a smile broke loose
It was like a summer's day
A revelation
It, pure rebirth
It made me giggle
My heart swell
For moments
I again felt like your little girl
The smile blunt and straight on
Was when you heard, realized
Luca and I were sitting there
Dad, that smile
After all these years
So young, so fresh, so straight forward
So alive
So ready to say,
A final goodbye

A not yet goodbye, from your daughter Naomi

Chronicling His Death, Near the End, Rebecca and I

At the foot of his bed
We stood propped
Against each other, shoulder to shoulder
Leaning forward
Aghast
Watching the real-life, living, true life
True end of life, death
Our eyes glistened as if
Stung by cold wind
Our heads throbbed
Trying to grasp
What lay before our eyes,
Our father and grandpa
In the process of dying,
This is death?
This is what death looks like?
Astonishing to understand
To know
It is indeed, a real true fact of life.
As he yields, fussed over
By a team of Irish angels
Using Chinese medicine
With Celtic tunes
Mediating the air
Provoking the celestial
Mary came by, (she also was a resident in Sheila's house)
Mary, the same one, the ancient one
The *Virgin*
This time instead of giving birth
She was administering *last rights*
She became his self-appointed death guide
She settled her hands deep into his face, familiar
Until her fingertips landed on his heart throbs
And said firmly,
Look Bill, open your eyes
Look, look loud
All your people are here!
And we were
Odd tagged along bunch of strangers
Plucked together like a bouquet of wild flowers
Welded together
By the heat of our love for my father, her grandfather
Our passion, the flame
To give him, hand him

The torch of his own death
His most important moment
As she, the lead priestess, said
And as his breath came and went
And his eyes fluttered open, momentarily
To let us in
Strong and straight
His laser truths riveting into our hearts
And then they trembled down, closed
And as his breath stumbled
And fumbled around
Help me, help me
He would whimper, intermittently
Help me with what is going on in my body
Look Bill look loud!
All your people were there
The odd tag along group
That became your death family
They grew there by your bedside
Out of your imagination
Out of your prayers
We were your composition
Your musicians
You, our conductor, our director
Your hands lifting off the floral sheets
To settle us into song, our designated positions
We intuited you, and followed your direction
We, too, looked loud
Because you opened up the skies
On our still to live lives
As you were about to disappear
You became our finest and greatest teacher
Look Bill, open your eyes
One last time
Look loud
All your people
Are here as well
We all came out to be with you
As you ascend the skies
We bid a final goodbye.

Naomi Barber, Bill's daughter
April 19, 1998

On Good Friday, April 10, 1998

*Luca and Papa Bill

Luca and Papa Bill
He kissed Luca's hand
With lips moments from departing
He knew that
This child was perhaps
His greatest torch carrier

Naomi Barber
Luca's mother

*Luca adopted as an infant from Paraguay in 1988

Lessons I Learned Watching Rachel Weiss With Her Grandpa Following His Stroke in Spring, 1997

Rachel crawled into bed with him
Not lover, nor wife
Granddaughter and angel touch
He stretched a palaver, her grandfather
Limbs lying around
Like tree branches
Sucked off the trunk by a vicious
Stealth wind
She just crawled into bed
To lie next to him
To hold him
To pull him back
Into some semblance
Of his old intact self
Just memory jangling out there
Rachel pulled him in
Like a bride against
A hungry groom's shoulder
A lover with a swift knowledge of destiny
He folded in like an infant
Retrieved from impenetrable darkness
Against her soft twenty-four-year-old skin
Her blond hair like spring bird feathers
Against the pillow, a halo
Her strong swimmer's body
Held him firm
We watched as she retrieved,
Revived him
Not even a moment to hesitate
To contemplate the appropriateness
Of the gesture, the action
On the bridal bed of renewed innocence
Grandpa and granddaughter
His stroke lapped against the sheets
Subtle spring breeze
He was her infant at first touch
While Rebecca and I were frozen in transition
Trying to assess this new status
Of father and grandfather
She dove in, one life force
Against another

Naomi Barber, Rachel Weiss's Aunt Read, At Grandpa's Funeral April 19, 1998

Dad, as he prepared for departing

Do you want to listen to a Bach CD?

An emphatic, *No!*

Bach is too beautiful. It will make me miss life too much.

Near the end, he parted with the familiar

The loved shed it like a snake's skin, stripped down

Whatever there was, was gone, gone inside

Faint footprints evidencing time

Striding up and down bloodstream and brain

Imprinting

The unfamiliar, held at a distance

As hearing and sound faded

When breath became the music,

The sounds, the tympani of departure

I learned cherish, bring inside,

Yield don't resist love or loving or longing

Press like a child's nose

Against a window of toys and warm sounds

Give in, take in, don't be afraid

Be hungry at every moment, every experience

But not desperate

And when it is time to go, to die

It is as if a bubble, a raft, a sweet cloud

Of remembrance, protects, holds

The waiting body being escorted away

And, the spirit plumed and proud

With memory endures and stays.

Naomi, after his death

May or June 1998

July 28, 1998

He's a frog Poppa is a frog
One of those plump ones
Jumping in and out
Of the firmly rooted pond *Cat o'Nine Tails*
The sweet thick pond grasses, like flaxen hair
Wind-swept, wind-blown
Almost, as if off the face of a beautiful
Lithe, and young supple girl
Whose body lifts to the wind
Without reserve,
Poppa is a frog listen to the song.
Poppa played tuba in college
Poppa loved the tuba and taught tuba to Joan
Joan seemed big, when I was four and five
She was one of Daddy's high school students
Who also was my babysitter
Joan huffed and puffed
Her cheeks bulging out like a frog's belly
She held the tube but with difficulty
But the sounds were deep like grumbling bellies
Poppa gave me *Tubby the Tuba* to listen to
I played the record a 78 over and over
The plaintive song the frog sang
Alone am I here I am alone
To the evanescent night sky
I was alone like that
His song became mine
Tubby and I learned the song and sang it together
And when *Tubby* played it for the orchestra
Whose members immediately caught on
And joined in glorious and harmonious unison
In frog, *Tubby's* and now their song
I sang the loudest my heart leaping about
Like an excited frog, perhaps admiring a rainbow
Or skirting a thick and supple and yielding pond grass
And I got to know
There was a way out of loneliness a way to get a song
That others would want to sing
Dad, Happy Birthday
You are 84 today, but not as a man as a frog
I know with complete certainty that, that is you
There are miracles there is an after-life
The ashes your son and I and your priestly last wife
We spilled hand full by hand full on April 18

Still windy and summer, but imagined
Is here in full lusty bloom
Dad, there is nothing that resonates clearer
Across the mountains than your frog song
We sit on the pond bank, and lie back, and listen
The quiet listening you taught each of us
The setting sun as if a light turned up higher
Gets brighter and more vivid
If for split seconds
We are the light of your darkness
You have relieved us of a certain fear
We know that death is a friend, a song
A hearty splash at the edge of a mountain pond
We are safe and unfrightened
Life's cycle is grass blade,
Pond bank and rippling wavelets
Little tremors of excitement
Your death is nearly giddy with song
And we have learned to sit and listen
And really hear
That is all you ever asked us to be
Alive with quick listening, deep looking
And with kind, good and giving hearts
For *Bach* for frogs for life for love
For father's who come along but rarely
And you, without doubt or pretense
Were one of those
Leaping about now without restraint
Mountain breeze cool water ripples arching endless sky
Imperturbable mountain ranges
Is truly the measure of this man

Remembering Grandpa on his 84th Birthday, from his daughter Naomi

Turning 70

How do you feel turning 70, you ask
I feel good, so good
To quote James Brown
Although nobody like me
Appears in the mirror
And my wrists spotted
Stains of years passing
Can't remove those
I will never appear like I was
The mirror image is gone
Takes courage to stare
At the me in there

But I feel good
To live to see 70
And I can still see
If a little murky and cloudy
I see three children
They are each good people
Deeply and daringly good
And the older two
Each has three more
I am a grandma six times over
And to think that Luca and I
Lived to see him turn twenty-two
That death that snatched
My girl hood face
That death that etches
Brown spots beneath my wrists
We escaped Luca and I

What more to ask of life
I have a Jeremy and Rebecca
And a Luca and then
A Sophie and Willa and Owen
And a Hudson, Daisy, and Upton
And along with them a Daddy Craig
And a Mommy Tonia

Love always baffled me
Marriage threw me
Being a daughter
Nearly capsized me
But here I am 70

Surrounded by friends
And friendships
Many made by sandboxes
And walks home from school
It feels good
Good to be alive so good

Why? I asked my father at six
Because of Bach he answered
When he decided to die
He said *no more Bach*
It is too beautiful
Bach is still not too beautiful
For me and I now know *Why*

I am 70 and I feel good
So good the bible did not best me
My children Jeremy and Rebecca and Luca
Celebrate me
It feels good – 70.

Naomi Barber
July 17, 2010

Foreboding Remembering Mark Krupnick and Me

Saturday Summer of 1958

Dearest Nibs,

I have dismissed your recent yellow-sheet letter as that of an unfortunate counselor deranged by "hay fever in full bloom," a "bad case of the runs," a CIT "who's been laid three time," and the seeming lack of any love interest. With all this and some more I can quickly forgive you your unhappy lapses in good taste and, less reprehensible, several spelling and grammatical errors," e.g. "hypercritical" for "hypocritical". After completing your letter twice, it is now a patchwork of underlining and comments, all of which I would send back to you but for the fact that I don't intend to be a Harvard-style pedantic.

Now after that tongue-lashing I must make some apologies (very sincere ones) of my own. I want to say that I'm sorry that I didn't park and attack you instead of gabbing so much down the shore, possibly I should have grabbed you sooner than that. Anyway, since from your rather unfriendly letter it would appear that I'll never again have the golden opportunity, I want to register my profound regrets. Be assured that I abstained not because of disinterest in you. Your probably well deserved, did open a few sores of not too long standing which haven't yet fully healed. But be warned that the experience I'm gaining among the dissolute Maine-iac chicks should make me invulnerable when I get home to such charges ever again, I don't really believe that you are "icy" either.

Note: Mark Krupnick a golden opportunity, another, I missed. He warned some years later, that he didn't think I could ever fight through myself to fall in love and land next to the right guy. He was right. Two failed marriages. Never said yes to the right one (s). I am alone at 71 and he is dead. He fell happily in love with her by his side when he died at 63 of Lou Gehrig's disease.

- <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/apr/15/highereducation.obituaries-history-link-box>

Mark Krupnick, who has died aged 63, was a leading cultural critic and interpreter of the creative life of American Jews. His career was closely tied to the fading reputation of the New York intellectuals, from Lionel Trilling to Susan Sontag, whose sharp-edged essays and cultural combativeness brought a new style of intellectual life to American culture.

*Krupnick's best-known book, *Lionel Trilling And The Fate Of Cultural Criticism* (1986), captured with surgical precision the profound ambivalence in Trilling's mode of cultural criticism. Trilling's reputation had begun to fade by the 1980s, though, for Jewish intellectuals of Krupnick's generation, settling with his legacy was a powerful imperative. Krupnick's book, an intellectual obituary of a high order, showed why Trilling had mattered, and why he no longer did so. He also edited a collection of essays on the theorist du jour, Jacques Derrida.*

Krupnick's parents were Yiddish-speaking immigrants, who lived in a largely immigrant community in Irvington, New Jersey. They knew nothing about the life of the mind in their adopted land; Manhattan, across the Hudson River, could have been on the other side of the moon. The complex provincialisms of the New York intellectuals, and their argumentative politics, interested Krupnick less, perhaps, than the powerful ways they read literary texts. For some of us, he wrote, "reading texts may be more than a cognitive activity. It is nothing less than a way of being in the world."

As a young man, Krupnick was sent to Newark Academy, "a dingy day school, where I spent, miserably, ages 13-17". He went on to Harvard University to read English, and, taking a break from its oppressive earnestness, lived for two years in Greenwich Village, handicapping horses on the sports desk of the New York Post. In the evenings, he was a regular at the Cedar Street Tavern, the favourite bar of the younger abstract expressionists.

Krupnick graduated from Harvard in 1962 with the highest academic honours, and continued his graduate work at Brandeis University, Massachusetts. A Fulbright scholar at Darwin College, Cambridge, in 1965-66, he taught at Smith College, Massachusetts, in 1966, and then moved on to Boston University for five years.

Boston, in the 1970s, was a cauldron of social protest, generational struggle and ethnic aggression. The university English department, with heavy-hitters like Helen Vendler on the faculty, was a blasted terrain of ill-will between traditionalists and young radicals.

*In 1969, Krupnick joined the staff of *Modern Occasions*, a quarterly review founded by Philip Rahv after he broke with his former colleagues on the *Partisan Review*. Krupnick admired Rahv's essays, which are now largely unread. But it was the malicious reality of the man, then in his early 60s, which was an education in the ways of power and disaffection.*

*Rahv hated the counter-culture, from its music to its libertine sexual freedoms, and used *Modern Occasions* to attack over-inflated reputations, cultural backsliders and hippies. "I was continually being pushed," Krupnick wrote, "to perform demolition jobs on new books of literary criticism, but it was demoralizing to be used as an extension of another man's anger, the hammer in his hand."*

Krupnick came back to England in 1972 to study at Anna Freud's child therapy centre in Hampstead, north London, and was a visiting lecturer in American studies at Keele University. On his return to America in 1974, he became a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee.

He emerged from the culture wars a saner and happier man when he met Jean Carney, a beautiful journalist working in Milwaukee who wanted to study human development at the University of Chicago. After their marriage, and the birth of their son Joe, they moved to Chicago in 1979. Krupnick made the long commute by public transportation from Chicago to Milwaukee for eight years, while his wife completed her doctorate.

He took a professorship at the University of Illinois in Chicago in 1987 and, in 1990, became a professor at the divinity school of the University of Chicago, where he taught in the religion and literature programme. This job marked the happiest time of his life: he had a lively, handsome son, a profoundly happy marriage, and the chance to work in a stimulating, collegial environment.

Then, "on the day after Thanksgiving in 2000," he wrote, "I was rushed to the emergency room of the University of Chicago hospital." At first, the symptoms suggested a stroke. A diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) soon followed. Known in America as Lou Gehrig's disease, this condition is characterised by a progressive degeneration of the motor cells in the brain and spinal cord. It is irreversible and invariably fatal.

The kind of ALS which Krupnick had was progressive bulbar palsy, which soon deprived him of the ability to speak or swallow. His wife, by then an expert in the clinical treatment of attention deficit disorder, spoke his grateful words when he took early retirement from the divinity school.

In that address, Krupnick wrote with honesty and directness - and anger, too - about the disease, and his impending death. In a culture which preferred death to come wreathed in euphemisms and soft-focus acceptance, he wrote with a prose stripped bare of indirections. To me, he wrote, "E, my use of my hands is dwindling; so I must conclude soon." He had been making final revisions to a manuscript of his essays on Jewish-American writers.

Jean and Joe survive him.

· Mark Krupnick, critic and cultural historian, born April 18 1939; died March 29 2003

Chronology of Love

At 18 stopped dead in my tracks
On a stairwell at Antioch College
Love at first sight that was it
No doubt about it
You were in love yourself
With Susan and each time
She moved away from you
You came to me, we even
Stayed together above
Cam's bar and restaurant
In Yellow Springs, Ohio
Anita O'Day, "The Nightingale Sang..."
Love was never really consummated
In the regular way, the real way
But with heads spinning
We licked and loved each other
Up and down, it was like rice pudding
And apple pie to me, that homespun
"The nightingale sang..."
And then I fled, left Antioch
Deep into the night
Not even telling my parents
Said to friends it was to escape
Get away from you
That was not the truth
I was afraid I would flunk out
Get found it, passing as a student
When I was a girl
Who just wanted to die
So tired of hiding in her own skin
Staying hidden, I left to stay alive
Just to stay alive, you found me
In an Emerson College dorm
I alighted there for a semester
Before moving on to Boston University
Much more acceptable in the universe
From which I came, Jews all labels
How short I fell, turmoil built
Running along the Hudson
On a visit to NYC found me
Screaming, "help me, help me,"
The tugboats hooted by

Always with two girl's names
The Betty Sue or Mary Jane
I always loved them
You found me and sent me a plane ticket
It was football fall season
At the University of North Carolina
We went you and I while the crowd
Chanted, "look at those hippy lovers,"
At night we went to a black bar
And then we loved each other
By a wood furnace, closest I think
I had come to God, the real one
No one knew where I was
But then, I was with you
And in the following years
Each time I had a new boyfriend
You would ride up unexpectedly
On your motorcycle and whisk me away
Once next to Jim, fairly serious with him,
Sitting close on the steps of the Widener Library
On the Harvard campus, up you came
And there I went off with you
Probably never got the time to say goodbye to Jim
I was always thinking I needed to get rid of you
Told the psychiatrist so, and needing to rid myself
Of Margot, dear dead Margot, with whom I shared
A birthday and whom I really loved but again
Was scared of being revealed in front of her
Couldn't come clean with anyone
Leaving John became a noble cause
When I was twenty-one, on my birthday
Finally we or rather I submitted fully
And our love was consummated
The next day we went to Rockport
With my roommate and her boyfriend
The bride of night became the bride of light
A light showed through me, at the start
Of dawn such a light lifted over the horizon
Burning rays of unfettered sun seemed
Dim next to my glow, god John
How I loved you, how I loved you
My father whose desire for me
I couldn't judge and until this day
He has been dead a decade
He came to visit put me to the test
"If you love him and can't live without him

Go live with him," this dear dead father
To whom my mother swore I was unfaithful
By sleeping with John when queried
He suggested no pushed that I leave
Yet a third college and move to Washington
To be with John, never even said get married
And then history happened, I was
Getting my bags packed when John appeared
At my Cambridge rooming house door
In full military regalia, telling me he had been called back
They put up the Berlin Wall and reservists had to go
"We have a weekend and that is all," and so off I went
On the back of his motorcycle to Rockport and Gloucester
His sister lived in Gloucester when she wasn't in the air
As a flight attendant, and back again over the highway
And bridge and the next day I took him to the airport
In a friend's, another boy friend's car, may have been
A Bentley or a Bug, and when we kissed at the gate
With his eye always looking as they did beyond me
He left, and I drove to my class at Boston University
Told my professor that I had just said goodbye
To the love of my life and that breathing was hard
And then came along dear old Dad, whose hand
Cupping mine helped me compose and send
The Dear John letter that in effect ended
My life, "need to move on," he was so worried
That my flagrancy would keep me unmarried
While I was still fresh enough I could find someone else
Sent it without even looking back, finished school
Dangled a half dozen young suitors, even had
Dinner twice in two days at a favorite French restaurant
Anything to please me, at graduation time
I planned a trip to the Southwest "to live with the Navajos,"
I told everyone and put an ad on a Cambridge bulletin board
Asking for a driving partner it was playful and charming
And drew a dashing Frenchman with a little French Citroen
Looked like a beach car or jeep Father pursed lips said no
And off I went on a Greyhound going to Albuquerque
Seems as if I was this little empty can to kick about, sad
Arriving in Albuquerque stayed with my mother's oldest sister
Rebecca and her husband Bernie
Described the woman I knew as mother
And asked if any of the behavior I described seemed plausible or familiar
"She was wild, threw temper tantrums, wouldn't swallow food
We were all frightened of her," oh thought I and I had believed that
With the crowning of my head, I made her that way

They lent me their car, a convertible
And dressed in a strapless summer dress headed out
Unhinged and unmoored since writing that fateful Dear John letter
I set out to seek my fortune, a new boldness a new nobleness
This was my odyssey the world limitless and I fearless
As I moved a warrior to my twenty-second birthday
For a brief moment I owned my life
The Dear John letter in every lofty step as I moved beyond grief
Agony gnawed dug in and in this new dawn
It would surface as a sorrow beyond regret
And in an offering of righteous peace and love
Found myself deep within the Navajo Reservation
Reimagining myself, I learned to clean out the innards'
Of Prairie Dogs, make fried break, and roll cigarettes
Suddenly there it was a vision on a desert floor
I would stay, marry Patrick, Navajo cowboy
Card wool, weave rugs, let my hair grow to forever
Time closed in, this seemed right, my soul found home
An accident on barbed wire at a rodeo watching Patrick
And off the Chief of the Tribe sent me
The moons heat a lure as I rolled and crumbled
On Rebecca and Bernie's lawn the night before
The fateful departure, a cry shot from me
Meteoric fueled by regret and sorrow, John flicked off
And although I was always for him, "thank god for you"
I believed he loved, really loved me, me
But fate brought me back limp and defeated
Went back to school and thrown back on two worried parents
"If you don't marry you will find you don't need to,"
How prescient of my mother, and then Ben came
And after one or two dates, we decided to marry
Within three weeks, families all met, the wedding date set
And there we were exchanging vows, and so
Ben and I built a life I lost an early marriage baby
We moved to Switzerland and then England
Returning almost three years later and three
Weeks after we were back in Boston
I gave birth to Jeremy and there it was
A fearless power lifting in me nothing held back
My breasts rich and filled with milk
And I the face and spirit of Mary over and over
Holy and defiantly connected to a baby
"Glory be to the newborn king,"
I sang at the top of my lungs
In a clinic ward with other sadly dissolute mothers
She, mother, tried to drag his mouth off my tit

She threatened that I would be less lovely
Her words gibberish, her gestures crazy mad
I was the me of me the one
Who nearly surfaced with John
Who would have in good time
Another child came, Rebecca
But rumblings of fear and discontent surfaced
I knew as birth pushes truth at you that
I in time I would have to move on that
This was not the love I had imagined
I had lived pursued by a devilish mother
Crazy in her relentless pursuit of me
Scaring me into submission
Plundering tongue, dream snatcher
But in this marriage
Ben threatened me with a certain death
He had a loaded gun without a safety catch
Next to his side of the bed, the threat
Just in case I was ever not true to him
His philandering was okay and half
I didn't blame him I was stilled water
I was as unresponsive as a drugged wife
I was settled so deep inside myself
He said my sex drive was low
I would say it was sufficiently repressed
To make a psychiatrist lick his mustached chops
When I was thirty-two on a Washington consulting job
I looked John up in the phone book and to my
Amazement there he was, there was that voice
There was my heart with recognition regaining its beat
We met at the train station, as I was on my way home
It was his thirty-fifth birthday, he said
As he had before said, thank god for you
And asked why I sent that Dear John letter
Which he shared hurt, no crushed him, uh oh!
Over the next several months we would meet
The first time dressed in closely fitting jeans
A snug black turtleneck and black boots
"Hey there, Mrs. Tough Titty's," he greeted me
Once he had me paged at the Union Station
There it was my name
In full throttle, "come to the information center"
He asked that I meet him at his house
That time I was there for three days
After my work, we rode through the countryside
On his motorcycle, we stayed at a friend's house

Above Rock Creek Park overlooking a rushing brook
And made love, thank god again for me
The kid in the house appeared in the morning
His name was Jeremy, ouch, a piquant reminder
Defiant wife risks murder to be with John
We have dinner at his friends' house
I couldn't move from his lap arms around his shoulders
Goodness what his friends must have thought
They knew I was married with children
And they knew about John's life and situation
Yet to be revealed
By then I told John all about my sordid and difficult
Marriage where murder was not out of the question
He took me to his home
Showed me photos of his two boys
About the same age as Jeremy and Rebecca
His car was a jumble of old papers and beer cans
He was divorced and a little disheveled
And misplaced, he asked to come to
New York so that he could see Rebecca and Jeremy
When Ben was away and he sat on each child's bed
And looked on with the wonder I felt,
This all seemed so crazily right to me
On my last trip to D.C. we had that serious talk
First an anecdote for me about a Good Humor man
Who had murdered everyone around him
When he withdrew a gun from among the
Good Humor bars and cream sickles
It was if I was given permission and a little shove
To leave Ben that the inevitable was real, danger lurked
And implicit this stolen rendezvous
Brought me courage and a little time
Had he asked me, I would have
Taken the children and left Ben left
No hesitation, no Dear John letters to follow
And then he struck a blow to my heart
Which still quivers in the aftermath
He told me that he was going to marry Diane
That she liked sex as much as he did
And that sex was and would be central
To their lives, that they liked making love each night
More than doing anything else and with that
He shut the door on any possibility of our meeting again
Back to NYC, parsing my self into hidden diaries
The grief needing to be let
"What is sex for?" I asked the therapist I saw

To ease me out of marriage and onto divorce
She smirked like a cat licking the grizzle
Off her whiskers, with that she chased
The woman in me so deep inside
But I got the divorce clinically right
Keeping everyone whole, as she suggested
This was some eight years after John
I was forty and on my birthday sipped champagne and ate caviar
On the roof garden at my new brownstone residence
On the Upper West Side, no furniture
Just geraniums and hammocks, loft beds for the children
As life works, along came a man
Who promised sex, lots and lots of sex
I told myself it was to keep being young but it was
To get to know that part of myself that John
Couldn't unearth in me, what a disaster
How misguided this was
A poseur, as Jeremy called him, a nobody a sinister cruel
Man on the move, "I am on my way up
And you down," he would say
And tried to get me to have a facelift at forty-two
He was eight years younger and each day
He would find a way to remind me
Eight years, eight years, way on up and way on down,
Finally he brought a woman home he had met
In Brazil and I leave the bold adulterer
Grounds for divorce practically hummed
In my years, the court brokered none of that
As if a stampede of torture, the woman
Now fifty was just jowl and sulk
Withered hapless search of sexuality
Revelations low and behold
Without love, there is just nerve ending and shiver
And on and off with Margot's help would look for John
Wrote to Antioch and asked to be put in touch
Once or twice, had an address an old one
And then god bless the Internet and my
Limited ability to Google I found him
Living in Bethesda with Diane, that wife
Was he alive or dead? Tried to track
Maryland obituaries, the pursuit
Woven into the fabric of life and job
Sent a postcard or two, art postcards
From the Guggenheim, they didn't come back
But no answer ever came
A twenty-year Odyssey, a preoccupation

Searching for the unobtainable love of my life
On a San Francisco Street about five years ago
I thought I saw him but before
The glance could entangle he disappeared
Was it a mirage or for real
Did he want no part of me?
I wanted him to know that finally, finally
I had become that woman he could love
And then the miraculous happened,
My mother died, and among her things
Photos of John and me "look," my brother
Shouted out, "wonder what happened to him?"
I have had those same photos in a frame
Above my bed, at any rate, I took them
And made a copy and with a simple note
"Hey John, mother died at 92, found these,
Thought you would like to see them,"
Not even four days had passed when
It happened in an envelope with no
Return address, to Naomi Weiss Barber
He thanked me for my thoughtfulness
Said he was sorry about my mother
Once he had challenged me to get off her and move on
And said that he and his wife saw another
Antiochian frequently, someone who had coincidentally
Been a guest at my home and whom I dated
However briefly while I was at Antioch
And then he wrote, "I am glad you are well."
"Best wishes," and signed his name, John

With that I am alive again
He is in this same world with me
He knows where he can reach me probably won't
But when ever does an Odyssey reach the pot of gold
I have mine my dream and I are one
I am in love I was in love I never stopped being in love
At nearly seventy I have found the virgin bride in me
I have found her at the dawn of her being
Was there ever such a love as this?
And today, this day, I have a happiness in my heart
It is the hosannas of all springs
In all its flower and scent
Rebirth of bud and bird song
I know where I belong, just where I am
John, thank you, finally I found my man
Solitary and soulful, there are sunrises to see

Ancient forts and cathedrals, bluffs
By a blarney stone, Yeats and Joyce
Keats and Auden, I will sail off to Byzantium
Following the arc of sunsets, behold
The world in which John was lost to me
Not having true love extant not so deadly
Just so sad, so damn sad.

Naomi Weiss Barber
February 7, 2010

The New Yorker
Notice of Subscription Renewal
December 27, 2009
Charlotte Belle Weiss
October 9, 1917 – November 30, 2009

Year after year for a decade or more
Maybe fifteen years or twenty
The New Yorker would arrive
Monday's
“ Did you read the piece by, Seymour Hersh?”
Or the overlong profile of whomever?
Quizzed by our avid reader mother
Her Hanukah stocking stuffer
A subscription to *The New Yorker*
We all got it, my brother and I
And all four grandchildren
Our own literati, the girl
Who formed a book club
Books were the food she devoured
As she kept herself away from food
The girl who locked her jaws
Against food, reading
Three or four books a week
For a time only Jewish books
But she branched out
She gave up
Her solitary loyalty to Judaism
And stuck by the customs and celebrations
Without my brother and me
Secular and averse, at least me
To any kind of religion
Particularly the Jewish kind
She became the titular head
Of her observing suburban family
The offspring and their offspring
Of her brothers and sisters
There she reigned supreme
There they were in awe
She was their Lou Marie Salome
Redeemed each year
The New Yorker gave us something to talk about
Our mother was a killer
Her profile would stand hair on end
Her profile would turn heads
Her profile would have been mythic

And us, we could be case studies for Jung
Deep in the wind's most viral force
A claw reached out
A violent rupture in the air
Our mother's torment
Was our succor our source of nurture
On each Monday we will wait
To see the priceless covers
Of our *New Yorker*
Our story stuck inside ourselves
We have done nothing of note
How insular how small and pedestrian
She inflicted on us
The rage of a thwarted immigrant Jew
She could have, if not for our father
He shielded her from her grandiosity
Her delusions
He served us up sacrificial lambs
Her hunger for our lives
Ended only as she lapsed
Into forgiving us for her misery
On her death bed
And crawled back into
Her mother's arms
"Momma Be With Me,"
Her last audible words
The mother she pummeled
And terrorized
For speaking Yiddish
And ever so broken English
We will never call Momma
Or at least I will never
As I approach 70
I try to recapture the me
That was fully alive so briefly
From the time I left home at 18
Until I married at 23
I knew him 3 weeks only
And he never knew me
Never got to know me
The marriage lasted 17 years
Two children now with 3 each
Of their own
Within their smiles and crazy warm greetings
I feel at home.

Naomi Barber December 27, 2009

Faltering to Believe

Had my fill of catastrophic things
Pending doom lurking
Clouds hover weight on shoulders
Had enough of bad things
Don't want to worry
Don't want to know
Growing old
Eyesight
Filled with images
Of broken body and intestine
Found son no medical history
Ancient predispositions
Eons of past revealed
His body scripture
Tablet of ancestry
Of Jesuit bluster and sin
Imperialist sedition
Cankered the native
As they took soulful chant
To liturgical song
Guarani chorister
Usurping predator
In vestal garment with prayer
Plunderers' parasites
Fester volcanic rumblings
Lava of sin and degradation
Boiled over
Sewage spit
From diseased intestines
My found son
Host to imperial madness
Sepsis flowed in bloodstream
Putrid waters sewage's refuse
History's child imploded
Case history written
In the sludge curdling
Beneath the surgeon's scalpel
Residue of church of biblical text
Scrim to shelter sin
Abandoned at birth
This child
Who's blighted past
Rose like an archaeological site

Ancient ruin dug out
Past pulled intestines feet long
Lay rotten with excrement
On a surgical floor
The body narrative
Histories ruthless imperialism
Child of promise
Curdled ransacking recklessness
Exploitation extended
In a handful of prayer
Indigenous damaged
Child of mine
Sacred soul sustained
Jesuit book of prayer
More Hieronymus Bosch
Than Jesus Christ
And you the choice
Of my confused heart
Anointed most sacred
Of all archetypes, *Mother*
Am I no better than the Jesuits?
Drawing song
From the simple people designate
Living communally
In concentric circles of tropical huts
Architecture of mutual trust
Perched on limb and bark
At the edge
Of the majestic *Iguassu Falls*
A politics of *do unto others*
Mandela of love for the other
Gathered my rainforest baby
Loved him as I had the others
Pogrom and greed defiled
This child inflamed by past sin
Held in healing mothering hands
The provenance my constancy
Mother Courage stalwart warrior
When your eyes dimmed
Death and I did our dueling
Alive still
This sacred child of the moribund
Stomach bulging with contaminants
A body broken presented as whole
Now you gallivant the City streets
Darkened alleyways and bars

Taunting fate predators
Predisposed to harm and hurt
The succulent nectar
Of innocence still fragrant
In you Jesuit's hymnals soar
For me the sky lost its innocence
Glowing clouds stem possibility
Yesterday bleeds on tomorrow
In the orange and pink of sunrise
I wrap myself in my son's sorrow
Cunning the truth of it creeps up
Bated breath a moment darkened
Another foray with death
I live a half or less life
On eclipsed air
Dimmer eyes hard to breathe
Have had my fill of bad things
Struggle to feel optimism
That there exists
A natural life cycle
Writ large and small
For each child born of loins or turmoil
And that history recounts for me
I was a good and constant mother
In fact and deed

Naomi Barber
February 9, 2010

Eggs Won't Crack – Sophie Blue

Eggs won't crack
But you would
Think so
The aura of fragility
Bits blowing apart
Flesh like dust flecks
Floating not to capture
She won't crack
Or break apart
Her fragility
Will season rock songs
Dance steps
Heartthrobs
She will not break apart
She won't let it happen
She doesn't want to
She doesn't need to
To prove to her parents
Whatever
She does need
To re-fix their gaze
She will not crack apart
She tames her heart
We watch
Her spirit soars
Decibels high
Original music
Hits the charts
She won't break
Or crack apart
Too much life
Seasons and grows
Too alive
She strikes back
Family ties
Loosen
She soars beyond grasp
She won't break or crack apart
Life soars transcendent
Her steely will engages it so

Omi – June 2010

Rejuvenating Body Parts

Don't want to
Rejuvenate body parts
Don't want to
Replace body parts
Want to let them age
Want them to fit in
With my unreconstructed face
Dying is on the way
Offered seats from unlikely characters
On the subway
No restoration projects here
In some kind of furious
Mad ravishing harmony
All of me is going down
For the count simultaneously
Angels trill their voice for
The final Halleluiah Chorus

Don't want bits of me
In Petrie dishes
Lab tests blood urine
Collect your urine
Like rainwater
For twenty-four hours
My doctor urges
Scans MRI's please
I have become
An alphabet soup of anomalies
Of pathologies
Medical records cross-referenced
On the Internet
I am a specimen
Of a life ending
What could be so compelling?
It is death the wily sorceress

Latex gloves off me
Want to deteriorate
Come apart
My own way
At my own pace
Not to be probed
And charted
No names wanted

For what ails me

Time to reflect
Not to medicate
Contemplate
Look back
I did not become mad
Love a flop
Now that hurts
Defied history the bible
I was a good mother
Broke her spell
Demons driven away
My kids like me
I hated her
To her last breaths
Watching her ashes
Flush out to sea
On some inscrutable plane
She a mother never existed for me

The present
A moon's eclipse
Days get shorter
Air gets colder
Body chills up
Blood sputters
Buffeted about
By surly waste
The life of me
Draining out
Not to resist not to replace not to restore
I am merely nearly no more

How quickly
Will this star burn out
Shoot out of the sky
And in the smoky residue
Vanish for all time
I have been replaced
Bountifully beautifully
I am sanguine
Researching *Hemlock*
To short-circuit
Drools incontinence
The mumbo jumbo

Of lost language memory
I wait
I am happy
I feel complete
The last of life for which the first was made
Regret had its turn with me
The Navajo chant echoes
Beauty all around me
I was magnetized
To draw abuse from others
Harm had its way with me

Death stalks
Not to balk
How will I be remembered?
Never to know
I am dying
Soon breath will cease
It will come as a great relief.

Naomi Barber 2011

Death You've Got Some Food

*It collapses, crackling. Fire. Fire.
And my soul dances, seared with curls of fire.
Who calls? What silence peopled with echoes?
Hour of nostalgia, hour of happiness, hour of solitude,
hour that is mine from among them all!*

Thinking, Tangling Shadows -Pablo Neruda

Death you've got some food
Caught between your teeth
Some fleshy bits of me
Be careful they are diseased
But who I am telling this to?
You who have come to get me
In some marvelous of a circuitous way

Death I am the fool
Thinking I could shape
The end of me
And there you are
Disrupting the architecture
The plan time hours days
Left to me
The food is caught
Snaggle toothed
Lodged tight in there

Coming to grips
Fiercely clutching
Hours days minutes
Held a bone
In a rabid dog's jaws
Doctors' licking chops
Getting a hand on me
Already more specimen
Than person
Tissue from my kidney
Beneath enhanced microscopes
Lab rats squawk
I become a set
Of disintegrating question marks
Clear across the country
Blood samples
Dripping hourglass time
Is it this? Is it that?

Death your chilling breath
On my neck
How far the dissolution
Before you claim me?

Death be not glib
Already
Liver spots wreath my wrists
In somber ambergris
What else
Punch through arcading mucous
My lungs increasingly unreachable
Wheeze choke hacking puttering coughs
Plaintive frog on rock in stilling sunset
Sings sad singular song
Who knows what creatures
Rise as metaphor
For these hard won gasping breaths
Post death our father was a belching bullfrog
On a Catskill Pond
How I listened to Tubby the Tuba as a child
Forsaken love starved Dad
His upper body pressing
The cold brass banged up brass
Embouchure quiver of mouth and sound

The list of **No's** the impenetrable
No thank you chemotherapy
No thank you steroids
I've got experience
They roil the body
Helium like filler
Puffs you out
Bellows to a fire
Where is that neck?
Tucked in ostrich like
Won't have any of that
Won't be sick to be well
No replacement parts
The rot corrosives disease
Routing pigs snuffing truffle
The inevitability of my death
Just perspiration swipes away

My eyes look out
As if through mist
They call that advancing cataracts
And my skin waits
Its stormy eruptions
The invasion of hives
Little plump warriors
Commissioned to drive me
Scratching at a mythical itch
Inches from emptying
My body of its blood stream
What else oh the one lingering polyp
Clogging up my left nostril
Mucous heaping building up
I blow out the right way
Holding onto each nostril tightly
Gobs and gobs of thick gooey phlegm
Now that's a good juicy word, phlegm

Mother bobbing on the open seas
Is this the death you envisioned for me
I miss you mordantly
How you would have shrieked and howled
When I told you exactly
I have a kidney disease
A membranous renal disease
Of unknown origins
Anti-bodies sightings of aliens
Advancing on me
Oh no oh no oh no oh yes!
Soon I will be dead as well
Don't think my ashes
Will be tossed on the bobbing seas
But will never know
Where the white clumps of boney splints
The ash will be thrown?

*Isn't wonderful how
We are all together on this
Working as a team
Don't you feel better having us here
Mom you have lived a good long life
We will be in the hospice with you
My eldest son quips
A little morsel of truth
Illusionist me*

I haven't really let you in
The flesh hangs between eyetooth and molar
Forgot to mention I have only
One tooth left on my lower gum
Cost of babies the real and adopted one

Death you have pre-occupied me
But a cut behind the knees
Never ever dreamt up kidney disease
I have left just left
Skipped off the planet
Of the possible dreamt for
I am left with streaming epithets
Death be not proud - John Donne
This my hour of nostalgia
This the nothing of it all
In the hue of the light of the day

Once you have kids
Your life is not your own
My son the eldest one shouts out
But my death is my own
I insist
And make it quick
I will not see my 72 birthday
Of that I am sure
But the five months until then
Rapier waits fine-gloved hand
Gathering me up

Death who would have predicted
You would break into me
Through my kidneys
It is resonant
This is where the soul resides
Think the soul resides
Turning all offers to kick you out
Temper you
You and I are greedy for the end
Finally it has in earnest come
Behind the black lace mantilla
My eyes shine
Rocked shocked muffled disbelief
The howling the crying the denying
Then the vast and vacuous relief

Naomi Barber Late December 2011

To Think of Time

by Walt Whitman

1

*To think of time--of all that retrospection,
To think of to-day, and the ages continued henceforward.
Have you guess'd you yourself would not continue?
Have you dreaded these earth-beetles?
Have you fear'd the future would be nothing to you?
Is to-day nothing? is the beginningless past nothing?
If the future is nothing they are just as surely nothing.
To think that the sun rose in the east--that men and women were
flexible, real, alive--that every thing was alive,
To think that you and I did not see, feel, think, nor bear our part,
To think that we are now here and bear our part.*

*How perfect the earth, and the minutest thing upon it!
What is called good is perfect, and what is called bad is just as perfect,
The vegetables and minerals are all perfect, and the imponderable
fluids perfect;
Slowly and surely they have pass'd on to this, and slowly and surely
they yet pass on.*

9

*I swear I think now that every thing without exception has an eternal
soul!
The trees have, rooted in the ground! The weeds of the sea have! The
animals!
I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is for
it, and the cohering is for it!
And all preparation is for it--and identity is for it--and life and
materials are altogether for it!*

OBITS

Life is suicide, mediated...Susan Sontag

Here in the tight grip
Of the medical establishment
Desired subject for study
Sorting synapse splicing gene
DNA gleaned warring antibodies
Gobbling tiny cylindrical mouths
Fight to the finish
Survival of the swiftest the fittest
Urine flotilla of protein and body's detritus
Mixed up brew broke through
Kidneys porous as aged *Emmentaler*
Death found its way
Incursions hours whittled
Death rides the lacey foam
The brewer's head
Aerated urine spills out
Bubbles mirthful
This the champagne toast
Of my demise death end
Gabriel blow hard
Reverent horn
Lift life from me
Not with gale force
Quiet as an urchin
On the sea floor drowns

*HARSH (terrifying) treatments and or
Kidney transplants kidney dialysis)*

Probe the sultry air
The closing down of days
Not to split hairs with time
One last breathe beyond
Tempt not will not draw on

(Bright's disease is a historical classification of [kidney diseases](#) that would be described in modern [medicine](#) as [acute](#) or [chronic nephritis](#). It is typically denoted by the presence of [serum albumin](#) (blood plasma protein) in the [urine](#), and frequently accompanied by [oedema](#) and hypertension.

Emily Dickinson died of *Bright's Disease*
A welcomed affinity
Will I die of kidney failure as well
Finding a dear sweet kinship

A sisterhood of longing
Kidney's fail as love did
Both of us gazed out windows
Ineluctable shadows
Fantasy fanned and fell
Grim last sigh
Love imagined
Always beyond reach
Illusory as sequestered plays of light
As seen with squinting eyes dimming sight
Never to touch or be touched
Too late to kill off the badger
The dormant animal lust
Sucked upon its own death
Kidneys keeper of soul and rhyme
Time ran out I ran out of me
Lacy urine soft and tufted
Billowing with proteins
Spilling warnings for me
To get things in order
As life slips away
Sediments porous kidney
Sequencing a terminable
Weariness first organ to give out
An aggrieved bond
Emily Dickinson and me
Last breaths
Fear my posthumous found writings
Will not burn down centuries
With a heart's soulful pain
Searing world's transcendent beauty
Just beyond windowpanes
Read of her soul's infinite howl
Knowing without reservation
How harsh and penurious life loveless

I hold a volume of her poems
Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson
Published in 1890 posthumously
She died in 1886 she was fifty-six
Book IV *Time and Eternity*
Being starved being ignited
Love's flame just that a flickering light
Superimpose her death on mine
Gravesite rubbing
Last words last words hers

It is now I can see read
How she wrote her ending

*Good-by to the life I used to live,
And the world I used to know:
And kiss the hills for me, just once;
Now I am ready to go!*

Emily Dickinson, Farewell

Pinpoint eventual
Cause of death
Autopsy performed
Before the fact
Inside out
Dye is caste
My body an anatomical GPS
Mapped out route highlighted
Death need just follow
Your death is not your own
Scared oldest son cries out
Pushing me to find
The culprit but
Death waits baited breath
In the clamps clasp vise
The medical establishment
Found its next guinea pig
Licking chops
Network of colleagues
Research fiends
Got a live one here
From pillar to post
Scrub her body clean
Gleaning detective work
Rogue antibodies infest
My kidneys the object
Death on a warpath here
Already in death's hold
No need to know
The source the origin
The entry point
Constellations scar
Blight path of shooting stars
Rather the drinking gourd
Follow the drinking gourd. Follow the drinking gourd.
For the old man is a waitin' For to carry you to freedom.
Fireflies streaming blood

Frenzied in flight in darkening night

*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (Macbeth Act 5 Shakespeare)*

Doctors, doctors, doctors
Talking my hulk
My anatomy
Off your examination table
Heady researches
To wear you down scare you
Tire you break you
Down to elemental parts
They breathe fire
Ambitions blight
Blot out your personhood
Perhaps it is time
To observe the rhythm
And whys of death
Without treatment
Without regret
Now to resist refuse
I a research subject
Number whatever...
Moving to inner voices
However *sotto voce*
Shaping a death
The warp and weft
The heft of children
Clamoring after you to stay alive
While short-circuiting their own lives
Proud death I am ready
While there is still a laughter
Loving conversation lollygagging
Backs turned if for moments
Conscripted inevitable end
I am dead.

Naomi Barber 2012

AFTERWORD

Whoever invented marriage was an ingenious tormentor...It is an institution committed to the dulling of feelings. Susan Sontag

I know the truth now, I know how good and right it is to love – I have, in some part, been given permission to love. Everything begins from here. Susan Sontag

What is it like to be young in years and suddenly wakened to the anguish, the urgency of life? Susan Sontag

My Lie

*I own up to my own crime
against myself, which isn't my simple lie
but not letting the world in,
my words swallowed in a private wind,
my thinking too small to deliver me
to the edge of a greater valley,
offering a hand, a sip of water, and something o faith
in language, which brings you to me.*

Jen McClanaghan

On Old Man's Lament

Or I sit in the sweat of the neglected
And ponder what aging has done
I ask: what's become of all I expected?
See me I am a hollowed Rum Bun...

Harry Weiss (Uncle Harry, father's younger brother)

THE WORLD Is a Beautiful Place

*The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind happiness
not always being
so very much fun
if you don't mind a touch of hell
now and then
just when everything is fine
because even in heaven
they don't sing
all the time*

*The world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't mind some people dying
all the time
or maybe only starving
some of the time
which isn't half bad
if it isn't you*

*Oh the world is a beautiful place
to be born into
if you don't much mind
a few dead minds
in the higher places
or a bomb or two
now and then
in your upturned faces
or such other improprieties
as our Name Brand society
is prey to
with its men of distinction
and its men of extinction
and its priests
and other patrolmen
and its various segregations
and congressional investigations
and other constipations
that our fool flesh
is heir to*

*Yes the world is the best place of all
for a lot of such things as
making the fun scene
and making the love scene
and making the sad scene
and singing low songs and having inspirations
and walking around
looking at everything
and smelling flowers
and goosing statues
and even thinking*

*and kissing people and
making babies and wearing pants
and waving hats and
dancing
and going swimming in rivers
on picnics
in the middle of the summer
and just generally
'living it up'
Yes
but then right in the middle of it
comes the smiling
mortician.*

Lawrence Ferlinghette

Wedding Day: Wedding 1

Mosaics Minarets Moments Soap Suds Freudian Drudge Rilke Bach No Turning Back Gays Broadway Gypsy As
the World Turns Deception Reception Dovening Forgiving

It all happened *once upon a time* November 11, 1963

The day I died

Incantations tintinnabulations of *The Stranger*

Mother died today. Or maybe, yesterday...Camus

He shared not quite twenty-four hours after an informal date

Last night he shared

In my journal I wrote *I am going to marry her*

Yes flew out of my mouth *and when*

Three weeks, okay let's call my parents

Wise *Tanta Rosie* and *Tanta Becky* believed

You should know a man through four seasons

Accidental expedient *whatever*

Tossed myself flagrant into the *four winds*

No rose petals no ecstasy

Seemingly without choice

On a nowhere non-committal day overtones of Beckett

Tell them that I love my wife!

Richard Loving counseled the lawyers

Moment before they argued at the Supreme Court

Reticent restrained but for his not to be breached love for Mildred

Among bramble and brush dirt farms

Black Mildred and white Richard were husband and wife

Arrested from their marital bed

Rural Virginia grew their love

Misogyny couldn't *blow them asunder*

The Supreme Court made them whole

They wanted to live as a family

In the community in which they grew up

Be near their parents the children their grandparents

Eight years after the Supreme Court decision

Richard was killed by a drunken driver he was forty-one

Mildred raised the children in the family house

Richard a bricklayer had built and died there at age sixty-eight

I am in widow's black *Yahrzeit* candles lit bereft

I weep for Mildred's loss

I mourn I am stunned awakened

No man never proclaimed such a love for me

No man stood on such hallowed ground

I love my wife and *shall not be moved*
Diverted diverticulitis twisted intestines tongue-tied
Bride dies vows said
Didn't commit suicide when the time was right
Bluffed panicked somnambulant
Gave myself away
No rebound no second chances
Should have known better
Opera Buffo begins here
November 11, 1963
Was the exact day I died
A ritual suicide
My father read Rilke
*Again and again, however we know the landscape of love
and the little churchyard there, with its sorrowing names,
and the frighteningly silent abyss into which the others
fall: again and again the two of us walk out together
under the ancient trees, lie down again and again
among the flowers, face to face with the sky.*
Marion played Bach on the piano
My mother spoke in code
The double entendre cacophonous
Freud savvy her audience chuckled snickered
Wedding bell blues
Come on and marry me Bill
I got the wedding bell blues
Please marry me Bill
I got the wedding bell blues -
Marry me Bill -The Fifth Dimension
Mother shared that she neither liked
Nor approved of me
But that she wanted me to be happy
Think my therapist ever really believed me?

His mother, a soap opera writer
Came with an entourage
Of Broadway notables
All gay or *pretenders*
Huddled or scrunched
Forty guests on rented gold velvet chairs
In our living room
In Newark Jersey
On beautiful Keer Avenue
Blocks from Osborne Terrace
Where Allen Ginsberg stayed with Aunt Rosie
Jews of the Weequahic section

Still to move or flee
To South Orange or Short Hills
If peeked at pined for on Sunday car drives
Philip Roth grew up on Summit Avenue
Just around the corner
He ventured forth in *Goodbye Columbus*
From these very streets
We had moved from a modest home
In neighboring Clinton Hill
Only months before I left for college
A little more than five years ago

The wedding was perfectly scripted
Our parents each to enter as a couple
And we would follow practical strangers
A little more than three weeks ago
We didn't even know each other
His parents hadn't seen each other
For fifteen years
His mother was wife number two
With his father's current wife number three
Had two little boys four and six
Dressed in blazers and bow ties

In the scramble to meet the inlaws
We drove East the following weekend
As I came to know his birth mother
Turned out to be a pill popper
Wrestling with interminable
Weight gains and losses
Hiding herself in the dander
Cat litter and fur balls and high intensity
Screeching and piercing cries
Of two rarely seen Siamese cats
At the service
His mother spoke of the sanctity
Of romance, marriage and love
Lifted from scripts
Of her years of writing soap operas
At our first meeting
In her incredibly appointed carriage house
In West Redding Connecticut
She was nomadic and moved on a whim
Sadly each time to lesser abodes
Her sizeable inheritance almost at an end
While her son was out of the room

She forewarned me
Don't marry him he is a sadist very cruel
Thus spoke Zarathustra
His very own mother
Who knew me not at all
Suggesting I flee
Cruelty was familiar
Canonic the gravitational pull
I had unwittingly returned
To the anchorage of my childhood
Not so surprising if chilling
Come my philosopher king let's begin our kind of living
I had written married barely three weeks
At the wedding the creator of *The Brighter Day*
As the World Turns, Young Doctor Malone
Filtered the promise of love
Before it inevitably goes awry
She never slept a night
Without calling for her husband
Her one untrue true love
My now father-in-law
She wept, she cajoled fate
She spread out into years
Decades of stories
That held housewives enrapt
Love and betrayal
Heart break and disillusion
Cheating and trusting
Where does it all end?
The end is the beginning
As we stood before the judge
That day in my living room
The end was writ large
His father spoke of the sanctity of marriage
By the time he died he had had five wives
And many multiples of mistresses
Including his current wife's
Very, very best friend
Her roommate from Barnard
An Armenian woman
Who was present at the wedding
Arm and arm with her best friend
Unaware of the great betrayal
Mired in the muck of my past
In which my feet were still stuck
I was a missing bride

Hidden in a white satin
Maternity looking dress
My mother selected and made
I handed her the entire wedding
Appeasement never rang so true
Did she think I was pregnant?
Certainly not by this man
Or did she transform a potato sack
With a little tucking beneath the breast
To be as shapeless and into which
My body contours would be totally hidden
Obviated or camouflaged
Passion sexuality love
Great love true love
The love of one's life
Dashed tossed turned my back on
Froze my heart until it became brittle
And unyielding
Off to an auspicious beginning
The groom's only request
That there be no wedding cake
And there was none
And there was his bride
With a mantilla bordering her face
Whispering a barely audible *yes*
The day before we had argued
About wedding bands in the village
He called his mom who said
If she continues to balk
And be difficult, call it all off
The mother who packed him off
To boarding school when he was four
And then kept him
In holiday camps during vacation times
This mother
Who had forgotten about him
Locked in a theater on opening night
Of one of the two plays
She had produced on Broadway
While she ate Eggs Benedict
And sipped Bloody Mary's at Sardi's
This mother a sort of Auntie Mame
Who would dress him up to be her escort
Yet lose him to a darkened theater
This mother who forewarned me
Warned him of the danger

Of marrying him
Remembering always a lapse of will
After all he wrote
On the night we met in his diary
I will marry this girl!
And when he read that to me
I answered, *when?*
And that is how
We mounted this altar of sacrifice
This is when it became biblical
This wedding was splattered
With sins
The incising biting sins
Of four parents
My mother frightening
A real terrorist
A baby snatcher
Crazy and wily
My dad, Jesus and the man
Who dangled us at her
Drooling mouth
To appease
And then had us
Cling to his noble leg
For sanctuary
My groom's Dad elegant
With movie star good lucks
And a silverfish tongue
A lying cheating charmer
An artful deceiver
And his mom
Who stayed up nights
Longing for the man
Brief as a shooting star husband
Father of two kids boarded out
Popping pills fussing over cats
And drinking Blood Mary's
As the sun rose in the east
Spinning her day dreams
Into the parables selling soft
The soft porn mirroring
Universal female anguish and fantasy
She proffered morbidity and failure
She was a virtual farmer's market
Of love's cruelties and failures
The omen I never saw

Or did and read so well
On that day, November 11, 1962
I sealed my fate
I succumbed to defeat
This was the best wedding
I ever went to
If I ever go again
I want to come to this one
Said the 4 year old step-brother
As he left the house

We drove off bride and groom
To spend our first night
As husband and wife
In the charming country home
In Redding, satin sheets
And a wedding quilt
On the brass bedstead
On this night
I settled to marry numb
Betraying myself
Who more often than not
In the secret and stealthy folds
Of a days' reckoning
Only longed to be dead.

Naomi Barber
December 29, 2009

Howling Cat

I know you
Tennessee Williams knew you
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
Not to be aloof
Or you will be howling on the roof?

Naomi Barber 2012

Frank You Really Are a Conniving Pig

I found my son and I love him

The lawyer was watching
The same one who pulled Gustavo away from you
The one who said you can't have him
You thought his ears poked out too much
Your vanity is demonic and so out of order
You knew if you didn't fawn
And call out *my son my son*
She wouldn't let you have him
Our Luca either
And there you were plunged
Into the darkness of a dictatorship
But beneath a bulb in a seedy hotel
You saw the light
You sinister ignoble bastard
Ex-husband and father of our child
How could I
Now that I am dying in earnest
Everything is so clear so real
I sicken myself
Even this belied me
You bastard you conniver
You pimp you shill
You father of my child
How could I?
Whitewash on a fence
Rain comes you are gone
No evidence
You come and go
A phantom that can fuck
A fucking phantom the shadow
Can't understand can't see you with him
His dissertation advisor says
She is 93 she is wise she is right
Oh god what did I do
Another mangled moment of my life
Lasted 17 years sad to say
Lonely sad sniffed me out
Right around my private parts
Dug in and stayed
Until the next iteration the next self
Gravity pulling on him
The next invention of self
Found in a women's private parts

A constellation of desire and longing
By god that guy could fuck well
The *Pleiades*, the *Seven Sisters* howl
In the next phase of the moon quickly dim

PS *People who murder often live in situations that weaken sympathy and restraint. People who commit massacres...often live with what researchers call "forward panic." After having endured a long period of fear, they find their enemies in a moment of vulnerability. Their fear turns to rage as Steven Pinker writes in "The Better Angels of our Nature," they "explode in a savage frenzy."*

Serial killers are often charming, but have a high opinion of themselves that is not shared by the wider world. They are often extremely conscious of class and status and they develop venomous feelings toward people who do not pay them sufficient respect.

...The worst thing you can do in a fit of pride, to imagine your insecurity comes from the outside and try to resolve it yourself. If you try to "fix" the other people who you think are responsible for your inner turmoil, you'll end up trying to kill them, or maybe whole races of them.

C.S. Lewis put it that there is no such thing as an ordinary person. Each person you sit next to on the bus is capable of extraordinary horrors and extraordinary heroism. (David Brooks, NY Times, March 20, 2012)

Naomi Barber 2012

Who Asked You? Prelude to a Death

Here you live among outlaws your body's own cells. Whole phalanxes of them turn mutinous, become silent killers. This is a country that's both narrow and vast, where geography bends at the edges and landmarks vanish like Cheshire cats.

Oh we don't use that drug anymore, a doctor will say, five minutes after the drug was invented. So you have to become your own cartographer, make your own way.

When I was told I was going to die, I was shredded to realize I hadn't made any real difference. The life of a writer was uncertain, but as a writer, it seemed, I might leave a mark.

The Red Devil, by Katherine Russell Rich

Hung irregularly tying knots as connections...really letting it go as it will. Allowing more of the way it completes itself." Eva Hesse – art piece

On the 28th June Ingrid Jonker wrote a letter where she chillingly outlined her intentions to commit suicide by drowning. Overleaf she scribbled: *"One may think this is heartless, defiant, or all the rest, but to me it is really no more heartless than a person dying from stomach cancer – I've got it in the soul now, that's all."*

During the night of 19 July 1965, Ingrid went to the beach at Three Anchor Bay in Cape Town where she walked into the sea and drowned.

On hearing of her death, her father reportedly said: *"They can throw her back into the sea for all I care."*

On 9 May 1994, Nelson Mandela read her poem *"Die Kind Wat Doodgeskiet Is Deur Soldate By Nyanga (The Child Who Was Shot Dead By Soldiers At Nyanga)* at his first presidential address. He described her as: *"a woman who transcended a particular experience and became a South African, an African and a citizen of the world... In the midst of despair, she celebrated hope. Confronted with death, she asserted the beauty of life... To her and others like her, we owe a debt to life itself."* (Poet Ingrid Jonker)

The inescapable truth is that luck for old-timers will eventually run out. It always does. Horseshoe Crabs and Velvet Worms – The Story of the Animals and Plants that Time Has Left Behind by Richard Fortey

*- The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused - nor wretchedly because
An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
But at the total emptiness forever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true. Aubade by Philip Larkin*

continual musical line of our minds, the unstoppable humming... Antonio Damasio

Episodic Nonsensical No Rhyme or Reason No Order No Logic
Indulgent Effulgent Stray Muse Going Nowhere in Particular
But Yes the Very End...These the Next Set of In-between Years In-between
This and That Something and Nothing...Absolutely Nothing –Nothing At All –Last Breaths Last
Outtakes... NB

grappling scrambling charlotte rampling star dust memories oy gevalt woe is me still have mind and
memory kidneys go awry nice try...NB

Who Asked You?

Who asked you to come
And upset me
Upset my equilibrium
Force me to confront
Vulnerability
I just couldn't keep you out
It is embarrassing
Enemy antibodies
Attacking my kidneys
Idiopathic
No source no reason nowhere
Extraterrestrials
Invading
Now rule me
Threaten
A death notice
Forcing me
Into a fight
I wasn't ready for
Trickster
I was taken by surprise
And now and now?

The last supper
Of my last suppers
Yens hungers
Life flittering fluttering out
Moths harvesting a flame
Flies sizzled enamored
Will summertime come?
Or will I be gone?
A sob a memory a gasped *Oh No!*

Last meals hungers
Deep where birthing starts
Desires born
Sustenance *sui generis*
For the sweetness
Of death
No more remorse
Tasteless sightless
Time to move on
To inevitability

Last foods last tastes
Lethal last breaths
My body
Backed up
Sewer of piss
Protein spills
Porous spongy kidneys
Body pushed aside
Legs tingle
Thighs on pins and needles
Tectonic catastrophic shift
Body betrayer
Bigger bully
Than the sum
Of all my bad loves
Roll the rosaries
The worry beads
Each object in my house
Holds memories
Stories deft and final

Losing moorings
Drifting to postscripts
More past than present
Hour by hour I press
To remember review
What to discard
What to keep
Who to forgive
Who to love
What the tale
What the sorrow
What the narrative
Savoring finality finally come
Last breaths drawn
What should I dream about?
My granddaughter Sophie always asks
What should I be thinking at the end?
Moving off mooring
The tether looping docking shreds
I am coming undone
God speed
When there is none
I know about the dead
The dying the ones gone
My heart was their resting place

Where and in whose will I reside
Who will carry my death inside?

Lascivious tongue
Serpent's pitched forked
Blab bad *ill will blows no good*
Frothing fears not faced
Ignoring turmoil within
Spoke out
Gossiped worse than
Fishmonger's catcalls
Curdled milk lapped
Other's bad fates
What goes around comes...
Doubling back
Lassoed trumped by fear
Juxtaposed boomeranged
Harangued spit out girl
Fallible trigger mouth
Cruel enemy
Of my heart and mind
Silenced now
By death's hearty
Tintinnabulation's knell

Death comes toward me
Goodbye I whisper
Becoming unnecessary
Hour by hour
Flint skin by flint skin
Skins of time shed
Released unexamined
Mordant time
I pledge
I will not spend
One more day
Of filtered sunlight
In a room
With a doctor's sign
Affixed to the door
I will not
Go beyond kidney rot
However my body
Swallows me
I will not take a complaint
To another doctor's office

The mad descent has begun
Come upon me
The madness of death
I wait I wait I wait
For the children
Sadness yet to dawn
I am becoming
Paragraphs without punctuation
A raging river overflowing
A stream's lopsided swirling
Tumbling down melting to trickle
Clouds with my face disperse
Big hello's small goodbyes
Willing that
A whisper a shadow
Just as the sun dips
Eclipses the day
Moves on to the next
My death comes throttled sigh
In the breakage
Of one to the other

Confusion delusion infusion
Early spring flowers bloom
Frost chills
No going back in time
My death announced itself
Too soon or not soon enough
Bait and switch
Bewitched betwixt
Resist the melancholy
The maudlin
Dig in and begin
The blooming of death
Masquerading as enthusiasm
As daily spiritedness
Death breathes
Rancid putrid
Inside rot
Porous kidneys fill lacy beds
Of brine slime pee
Proteins pore out
No longer feed stem and tide
Blood dies can't survive

Drained of nutrients
Heart starved
I am dying
From way down deep inside

Walking in the Conservatory Garden
Watching spring flowers wither crisp up
Frostiness drains flower blush
Capture a day of fragrance and blossom
Of beauty retreating too rapidly
Under the freeze and chill
Unlikely footsteps lead to death
Bye turtles hatching
Bye ducks snatching fish
Bye blossoms
Bye beginnings new beginnings
Believe that next spring
I will not know if it is premature
Death oracle
Taking stock inventory
Where I succeeded where I failed
What I didn't live up to
When I didn't catch the golden ring
What I didn't do
What I wouldn't let myself do
Love, love I wouldn't couldn't...
My poor sagging self
Love never entered into it
It was out of the question
Beyond regret
I am left with
Crackle for bones
Wild yens for food
Sleepless restless
The death rattle titillates
Dominates
Death dominatrix
Spikes dig into heart
I walk
Penetrating reality
Asking asking
What next? What next?

Medicalized to dusty death (Shakespeare)
Behind the infusion doors
Medicines to stave off

Patients metaphorically *terminal* or not
Name and birth date of patient affixed
Nurses attach the drip
And here and here
Very existential very brave
Contrarians depressives
Death wishers and lovers
Death flirts
All have said *yes*
Fill me with that poison
Mixed specially for me
They call the medication
Difficult, colloquial
Yes fill me up fill me up
I want to live
I want to fight
Strictures on my heart
Pondering all of this
Yes oh yes oh yes
I want to live
If I throw up
And get sores in my mouth
If I am in pain
If family and friends
Look on appalled
Sorrow wrinkling their brows
Can't hide feeling appalled
And feeling sad all at same time
Neighbor in next Naugahyde infusion chair
I'm getting a new wig
I never go out without makeup
I have another year and a half
Send copies of medical reports
To family each time
And yet and yet

Yens cravings
Lobster Mac 'n cheese
Stomach yearns
Craving digestion desire
Scrambling for solace
Running out of time
Hunger rampant
On a rampage
Food ransacked
Most sicken me

Yet driven to buy pastrami
Brisket meat loaf
A lifeline
To feeling whole real alive
Nauseous in my core
Worshiping food
I will die
Hunger's greed
Not to be denied

Birth death
The last of life for which the first... (Robert Browning)
Ornery cravings
Vampire blood sucking
Hard driving
Mindless
I wander grocery isles
Craving what
Something grows within
I prowl the street
Appeaser the trumpet the horn
The sickle the hoe
The hood the headless faceless
Death waits
At the checkout aisle
Robot voice
Hungers longings catnip
Grocery aisles
I die yet stalk
Famished for what
Only to pinch myself alive
Eviscerate exacerbate excommunicate
Transubstantiate
Wafer wine
God not believed in
No salvation for her
Never a Bat Mitzvah or Christened
Munch crunch soporific
I glide grocery aisles
An investigative reporter
Looking for something
Anything
To appease my hunger
Finally ready to take life on
I die
Always so at the end of life

Wilting floral bouquets
Regrets
Samplers with homilies crocheted

Vulcanized galvanized
Rage against death, (Yeats)
Go quietly never
Breath blows out hard
Sputters spits spews stops
Eyes flutter open
No sight left
Death dies hard
Stalk market aisles
Searching for what
As the wind changes
As the wind-bell chimes
I change and change my mind
As I die I prowl
As I die I hunger for life
As I die nothing tastes as right
As it was in my mind's eye

I am on the prowl
Foodie hoodie
Dying for something
Don't know what
Yen Zen
Can't help myself
Going to the store
Buying some more
But what
Donuts glazed
Lox and cream cheese
Coffee what not
Hungers rage
Amazed dazed
Bodies die
Yens thrive
Primordial archetypical
Seeded in ancient tummies
Direct lineage in hunger's din

This isn't the way
I intended to die
Diseased kidneys
Backing up uric acid

How did this happen to me?
And why
Never mind why
Why me
I did everything right?
My father asked
Plaintively
When his memory became faulty
No not *why me?*
Me it is me
And now I must
Reorder rethink re-plan...
Shopping for poisons
Can't accumulate enough pills
And what kind
What to lace it with and when
When does the desperation
The fast moving
The ice-melting slide
When does death
Suck me in
It moves fast when it comes
I want to have the last word
How much poison?
Afraid to look on Internet
Clues post-death post mortem
Not to share my shopping list

A molten glaze a parting breath
I know I know
Last breaths draw truths
I stand on a cliff
Looking back
Time is slowly
Releasing me
The story
Jumbled context
Texts this and that
Inside out
Outside in
I begin
Pierce time
Peek inside
All that was ever mine
Birth unraveled
Poking a childhood hole

In time's aftermath
Didn't kill myself
Didn't go crazy
Simmering cauldron
The flame is nearly out
Whole hearted half sure – (Sharon Welch)
Possibility extinguished
Dims death at sunrise
Hot breath
Shoulders compress
I never did all
The end is near

There is something morally condescending about forgiveness –(Edward St. Aubyn)

Who I don't forgive and why
Let me count the ways (Elizabeth Barrett Browning)
Those who with churlish lips
Lied when they said they loved me
I ordain myself
Religious leader
Presiding over my life
Here to deliver the eulogy
A practice run
Anticipating death
The sermon comes
This is not a chronology
Moving through time
I move back and forth
Suits my purpose
Picking up losing stitches
Knitting needles clacking

*Dreaming back thru life, Your time –and mine accelerating toward Apocalypse
and the final moment –the flowers burning in the Day –and what comes after*

*A flash away, and the great dream of Me or China, or you and a phantom Russia, or a crumpled bed that
never existed –*

Like a poem in the dark –escaped back to Oblivion

*No more to say, and nothing to weep for but the Beings in the Dream, trapped in its disappearance,
Sighing, screaming with it, buying and selling pieces of phantom, worshipping each other, -(KADDISH -
Allen Ginsberg)*

Naomi Barber

Ending: excavate extradite expedite experience exact eliminate evict extracate

We wanted to be extraordinary
My mother and I
It would neutralize the warring pain
That would set us free
We were more that is why we were less
We were smaller far smaller
Meaner our savagery mediocre
That is what hurts
Mythic durable big
Was nothing but aberrant
Ordinary commonplace
Only the holocaust poverty
The *Depression*
The kindness of her *Observant* parents
To their mean spirited squalling daughter
Only the stains of the old land
That bled through her
Her menstrual blood
Her heinous mouth
Her restlessness
Wanting demanding more
Always going after far less
Big blocker her husband my father
She tried to ennoble her and my struggle
Her need for grandeur pure madness
Had us living in higher registers
She omnivore of major proportion
Attacking and recoiling
A pitiless snake
She was crazy she was crazed
She was depraved
She came undone and went mad
Beating herself spewing knotty gruel
Flying off her mouth
Insane epithets escaped
Images of my childhood glint
Savage memories weeping aching
Remembrances of things past (Proust)
Can't blot out her nighttime runs down basement stairs
He whose twisted urges settled on her
He who chased his chastened wife
He who saved her from the furnace mouth
How crazy was it all and yet and yet

How ordinary I have come to see
Reading disrupts the illusive the illusory
Ours was just another troubled Jewish family
Scattershot remains from the old country
There was nothing glorious redeeming
How to extinguish *blow out the candlelight* (*Boyz II Men III Make Love to You*)
Obliterate redeem
Happy go lucky times sweet dreams
Drawing a blank
Thick paints layer upon layer
What surface to let dry out
Fear of destroying a painting
Mediates against creating great art
An artist friend told me
Doomed unsettled
Can't *white wash* - *Tom Sawyer* where are you?
de Kooning knew her found her
She the crazed wild *Woman 1*
Need release from these craven images
No! *Nevermore* No More (*Edgar Allen Poe*)
Retrieve rebalance get a good tack on

Once upon a time I wanted to cut off truncate life
Slicing wrist and puncturing tummy
The place where babies would grow
Suicide's strong appetite for me
Before *I was one and twenty* (*A.E. Housman*)
Flooding the pearly gates open
Tidal wave of the this' and that's
Churning jogging memory
Overturning turning over
Furrowed plowing
The desperate the fleeting
The fleecing of my life
Too bad too late
My mother she pre-deceased me
By not too many years
I died last
Despite subliminal threats to overtake me
Remorse spilt over her letters of supplication
For these her byline soporific love tithes
Heirlooms of baiting and relenting
Travertine artful
Dear penitent the letters have been
Torn to bits by my shredding hands

By and by
I gave birth
I had children
That which was dormant
Asleep hibernating
Woman roaring came forth
Playful restorative
Dancing singing
Sunsets our daisy chains
Clasping hands
At Maine lakeside retreat
Sung in unison
Day is done gone the sun...(Taps - Horace Lorenzo Trim)
Two incontrovertible
Different disparate lives
One handmaiden to the insane
The other sumptuous breasts
Spilling rich with milk
Humming mirthful babies suckled
Imbued the sublime
Another girl another time
Sprung from a rib of my own
Marriage came at a different cost
Come my lion my king (Naomi Barber)
I sang to their father
Appeasing the demon
Staying faithful
Preserving the crazy zany
Shrieking fucking madness
In childhood lapping over into
The sanctity of marriage
Ours a wild game preserves
Dualities existed within
Wife to maniac sadist man
He of not so different strip and color
And yet as maiden mother
Loving like no other who ever came before
I that Mother *and Child* as depicted (*Kathe Kollwitz*)

Now to state clearly loudly unequivocally
I was happy I am happy I was alive I am alive
Flowers birds trees and motherhood exalted
One day not ever like any other
Downward spiral tripped
Uneven death body corrupted
Off to eternity

Life was good for me
Death always an option on unsavory days
No longer so
And yet and yet
Willingly know
There is nothing when breath has left
All rests *in the minds eye (Oliver Sacks)*
And in other's if sorrowful sighs

Naomi Barber
April 2012

Autodidact on a Spree

Standing still
Looking about
Seeing
A world I created
My home
Travelled eons
To locate
This distant place
Me inside out
She functioned well
Foreboding prophesy
I was eighteen
In constant motion
Time amorphous
Diaphanous daze
And now and now
Idiopathic death invades
No rhyme no reason
No point of origin
Circuitous route
Destination kidneys
Kidneys diseased
Spilling proteins
Unambiguous diagnosis
Prognosis dim
Impetus to walk from
Work friendships plans
I have come home
To read listen
Look about me
Sipping wine
Taking it all in
Span wide-lens
Retrospective
This the place
Where I live
The home Naomi built

Ravenous rapacious
To know every word
In every book on shelves
Marvel at the art on walls
And the ubiquitous art pieces

Compositions of my own making
They tell a revelatory tale

Autodidact on a spree
Canonical
Books music art
My house
An amazing creation
A crucible throbbing
With self-expression
Before death undeniably
Entered rammed into me
Here to retreat
Intentional deliberate
Awake conscious aware
Death a lover's lick
Tingles on my neck

I a shell of smiles
And compromise
Drifter deceptive
Functioning
Extreme sport
Benumbed bedazzled
Continual movement
Constant action
Stunned to find
Things I had written
Sheaves by the thousands
Stuffed into random drawers
A shadow curator
Intentional mishmash
Death's allure
Digging into past
Rereading old poem
Flush memory aches
Forbidden disclosures
Displaced girl to woman
The past gathered
Finding the dreamt up me
Unfolding unabashed
Barely *one and twenty* (*AE Housman*)
Something in me clicked off
Foredooming prophecy
Functioning well feeling little
Motion without consciousness

What was me collapsing
Contemptuous avenging shadow
Suicide's lure denied
Intense desire to end my life
Grizzled stabbing at
Sites of passion desire
Didn't kill myself off
Consolation a life displaced
Shut down closed off
Mad motion dreams
Never to navigate destination

But then my babies came
I erupted Mt. Etna
Volcanic
Kinship with
Every animal mother
By instinct
By dint of will
Unabashed
I was in my element
To this day a coo escapes
A tingle of wonder
For a new life any and all

Doctor describes churlish intensity
Evil attaching rogue antibody
Invading kidneys alarming pace
Bringing me to my knees
Roiling ominous careening
Poisons infiltrating infecting kidneys
Death the mother of beauty (Wallace Stevens)
Death predictable play on life
Never before eyes so open
Felt as never before
The heart so tamped down broken
So maddeningly happily open
Dying inevitable for all
Random date initialed
Falling into grace
In this totally amazing
Unique and original personal space
Combative coming to life

Autodidact on a tear
Feeling euphoric blissful

Coming to acceptance
Damnably unattainable love
No kiss to remember
Never lolled post coitus
In easy luminous conversation
Every animal he said at last
After intercourse is sad
But the back-row lovers
Looked oblivious and glad (Lawrence Ferlinghetti)
Never ever happening like that
No time left for back-row loving
Time is running out

Autodidact on the loose
Autodidact on the run
No time to waste post-haste
In that looking glass space (Lewis Carroll)
Death coming at me hard
In this the house
That Naomi built
Jubilant generous
Solitary humbled
Virtual moments more
Before disabled motionless
Down to batting eyelashes
Books lift the agony
The torment
The years of empty gestures
The days I walked right by
Motion without meaning
Hidden hibernating
Again pulsating
Sensations of motherhood
Here a Rembrandt Vermeer
Flush with acute wonder
Beethoven Mahler Bach
Feel a unity oneness every note
Autodidact on the loose
In the ruins of lost time
I learn who I am
The academy my home
Portraits of me inside out

An autodidact awakens
Villon, Camus, *The Stranger*, Howl
Ginsberg's mother's name *Naomi*

Strange symbiosis but not really
She was as crazy as my mother
Only had sanctuary in a mad house
We kept our mother home
Abashed being observed
Her frenzied crazed ranting
Reading *Kaddish* brings me to tears

In the hull of my opining soul
A large crucifix in thick oils
A Goya print though probably not
A painting of a boy on a tricycle
Mother attempted to lighten
The ominous dark greens too menacing
Tinted it blisters with greater force
I love it its solemnity loneliness
Generous painted arc representing
The Africa beating steadily
Beneath an artist friend's black skin
An *Asmat* fertility woodcarving
Warriors with female and male sexual organs
A painting of football playing gladiators
And woodcuts of frenzied battling men
The walls a second skin
Look through an art book
Childhood sanctuary
World-Famous Paintings (edited by Rockwell Kent)
Prescient old friends hypertonic fingers
Holding first astonished breaths

Yeats Auden Plath and Sexton
Compendia of women poets
Mozart Quartets Beethoven sonatas
Du Pre and Barenboim playing Brahms
In London front row orchestra
Watched Jacqueline du Pre play the cello
Powerful upper arms yield passion
Unabashed her soul enflamed
Glimpsed what was hidden within me
Eight months pregnant knowing
With cloudless certainty
My marriage was a wild mistake
A beautiful baby to come
Seeded in a bed of expediency and deceit

Miraculous Google searches
Sustain vibrancy of memory
Death roils interminable
Yet I live as never before
Words thrash race through fingers
Eyes scan the sky magnified
I see a world I own today
A constellation of my own invention
Emotion pure unfiltered
Listen to the *Seventh Symphony of Mahler*
Not a word of a novel lost
Inhabiting a world of sight and sound
Not an inch of it resisted

Autodidact runs amuck
Life at home
Accommodating
Dreadful disease
Not to fear death or being alive
Strange emulsion inversion of time
Not to dread dying but to dream into it
A mind feted with idea and song
Holding fast to sky sun clouds sunrise
Coming home to me
Refuge sanctuary here
A home of curiosity and wonder
A place to inhabit if for moments more
Reflecting on a life of triumph
I didn't go crazy
I didn't kill myself
Reconciled with being loveless
Knowing why babies entice
Hold back nothing squirm tingle
Now it is me
Unreserved responsive
First eyes first flushes
Expectations wide open
Death handmaiden
Luminous light gotten it all back
A first calling out
With passion and delight
I am alive
Life yes life and soon to die

Al Pacino and Me

Question: Congratulations on turning 70. What was your birthday like?

Answer: It was a morbid affair. (Laughs) No, whether it's a movie opening, or a party, you always wish you were somewhere else. I am not in need of attention. But it was a little bit different than all the others. You are going into the eighth decade and for one thing, you are still here. Getting older, as they say, this is not a dress rehearsal. –
Al Pacino

*It collapses, crackling. Fire. Fire
And my soul dances, seared with curls of fire.
Who calls? What silences peopled with echoes?
Hour of nostalgia, hour of happiness, hour of solitude,
Hour that is mine from among them all! -*

Thinking, Tangling Shadows, Pablo Neruda

I write now with the raven of doubt sitting on my shoulder all the time.-
Cynthia Ozick

Not for sissies this getting older.

Bette Davis

David Hockney painted a chest of drawers, which sat at the end of his bed with the message: Get up and work immediately

Mulling the news

*Bleak alarming
Kidneys disintegrate
Diagnosed every which way
Idiopathic origin
Meaning
Don't know where it came from
I know
Invasive bad antibodies
Germinated
In the soft sadness
In my soul
Clips snips come to mind
Not orderly
Not to predict
What festers
Of what significance
Clamoring to be told
When you are dying
When you know you are dying
My body quit on me
Unruly messy
Death entering
Untimely if expected
Eighth decade*

*Fertile soil
To end a life
Mine came
From unexpected places
Though not so
Minute's hours click off
Time to take account
Veracity blows threw me
Kidneys shredding
Some truths
Not forthcoming
Others not worth
Acknowledging remembering
Stun gun the doctor's tongue
Bad rogue antibody attacks
Think think back
Who do I hate?
Who do I forgive?
The bloom of my bloom gone
To fight back with medicine
Though only so far
I am observed*

*My father shaped his death
A high bar set
Craft a death
Inexorably mine
Say goodbye
Words in formation
Dying well an art
They are watching
The eyes the flow of time
Got to get this right
A body departs
In uneven spasms and waves
Never know at sun up
If a sun set*

*Random bits and pieces
Come to mind
Recalling a horse's tail switching
Cows deep in the meadow
Up an unpaved road
From the hundred year old farmhouse
I owned for moments in time
Nestled in the hills of Vermont*

*The exigencies
The comings and goings of decisions*

*Walk with old high school boyfriend
In the Conservatory Garden
Mums beyond peak
Colors still startling
He comments solemnly
Gazing at the fountain
Three frolicking girls
Bronze skirts awhirl in the spray
This is what the id looks like
Both of us now seventy on a brief revival
No longer thinking or believing
He was more weird or crazy than me
He lived in an unheated hut
In a Pennsylvania field
Foraging and making
The same film over and over
In a field of mixed greens and clover
Mind numbing sustaining crazy
Ginsberg Ferlighetti Beatnik dreams
Miles of film on editing floor
Not an image on one of them
Now computer technician
Training to be a baseball pitcher
Dances three times a week - Swing
He was not crazier than me
I better concealed
Camouflaged in normalcy*

*Gathering last recollections
Philip Roth preoccupies
Parallels of post war years synthesize
Same Newark neighborhood
Stocked with Jews not budging
From Holocaust's overhang
Dear Philip Roth
Love never did catch on
Sex anomalous
Alien to my body and mind
Orienting wrong
Dreams blockaded
Docking cockeyed
Or maybe
Just went to*

Wrong kosher butcher shop

*Death making inroads
Bedrock defiant dying
Today not today
Not this one
Life in awkward symmetry with fate
The day casts an ominous shadow
Begging for
Another moment or two
To make amends gestures*

*Reading breathless making up time
Words crammed jammed into
Evaporating eviscerating mind
Archiving for last thoughts
Last reveries as breath departs
Existential encumbered by physical wane
Reading intensifying visceral connectors
Revelatory transcendental transformative
A scholar scrapped off the floor of Jewish text
Forbidden girl deciphers decodes
Intellectual joyrides with abandon
So struck by Oraleh mother in
To the End of the Land (David Grossman)
Oraleh I carry you with me
Parallel journeys
To confront or run from
Motherhood can kill you
Motherhood is killing
Not to open doors
Pick up phones
Who knocks calls?
With what news
Anticipating the worst
Paroxysms of the forbidding
Daily bread
Dead no longer to dread*

*My oldest son
Said he would marry
Whomever he was with
When he wanted to have a family
He found a pretty farm girl
For whom motherhood is an ill fit
The children live beneath the ground*

*In the moldy rabbit hole of her motherliness
Humbled to the third generation's sins
Door flings open
The sight of three small faces
Waiting for the moment
Of the unequivocal the unconditional
Never to come
No way to turn from the inevitable
I lay down next to Oraleh
On the cold stone of her sigh
I lie with her to sob to scream
Rioting through me
How I faltered
On my mother-watch
Consumed imagination saturate
Consumptive corrupting ways
Body breaks down
I come to the end
Of a place I leave
Depleted decimated
Children mired scarred
Chose against love
Children sense
Hearts longings
Love contingent
My fingerprints all over this*

*Flat-lined
By marriage
Living subterranean
Moved zombie like
Wedding vows said
Tossed confetti
I died the night
I promised myself as a bride
I came back alive
When I stepped out
Broke my word
Didn't stay moved on
Gunshots silenced
I left taking the gun
I left taking my dignity
The scent of assertion
Drove him wild
I will kill you
I will hurl you under a bus*

*My Olympiad discus man
If you take everything
I will...threat of death
Judge intimates
I can see where you say
She is a little crazy
Not quite right
Not strong enough
Weeks divided like Berlin wall
Nuanced custody rites
Caught in the web
Of a moment in time
He is old now has had a bout of cancer
No longer a university professor
It would have been our 46th anniversary
Today Veterans Day
We lived beyond the warring
Not beyond harming
The awful wounding scarring*

*And so the irony
In cracking bones
The eighth decade of life
The skeleton breaks apart
We remember less
And beg forgiveness
The day is young
Today I will go
To the Anselm Kiefer show
Pop a baby aspirin
When I feel my heart going crazy
When dizziness's gravity
Pulls me to the floor*

*Israeli writer Amos Oz's mother
Committed suicide
She beat her head ranted
Sat in dark silence
David Grossman writes
Of a mother
Who beat her head
Ruthlessly relentlessly
Maybe it's something Jewish
Maybe it happens
To those women
Who were forced to flee*

*Holocaust Europe
Dear younger brother
Other mothers like ours
Beat their temples
Their heads their breasts
They frothed
They tossed themselves
Into furnace and oven
Face down
We were not alone
Witnessing
A mother's fiery rage
Dread our daily bread*

*Death in plain sight
Death in plain sight
On this a full moon night
I am ready I am not
There is nothing beyond this
Star light star bright first star...*

*Married in haste
Had two children
Broke them
Along a hemisphere of wrongs
Archipelago of sin
Where to begin where to begin
Emblematic no corrections here
And then to pluck a child
Off a tree limb
In generous rain forest Paraguay
I eat the blush of my fruits
Taste their sticky substance
I am alive still here
The bereaved
Solo swan is on the Meer
What else what else
Nothing else
The rupture tear of time
Pulses and drips
Oozes and fomentals
Its torrential pain
Kidneys shred
My body in final orbit*

*Mother death to suckle
Redeem retrieve sweet dreams
Infant born cries out
Longing still for love
Mother death still desire
A sweeter softer embrace
The final warmth
Dreamt of
Before the cold
Breath ceasing
Mother death desire
Just a glimpse
A moment
Of rapture
Before yielding
To the eternal
For safe keeping*

*Naomi Barber
2012*

When My Father Was Near Death

*When my father was near death
His eyes got so clear so straight ahead
There was a riveting look
Nothing concealed nothing omitted
He just looked straight out
Straight into me straight at me*

*My granddaughter who is nearly three
Looks straight at me
Unembellished unfrightened
Almost inscrutable uncanny
A clear-eyed gaze
She just looks out unsparingly
Uncurtailed uncensored*

*Cleansed clear I have found that look
That way of looking that gaze
Untroubled unfrightened unphased
Unhidden unguarded
Near you and toward you
My eyes are clear my sight unblemished*

*The fear that twitched
Beneath my lashes gone
My clear sight found you
My sight clear because I found you
I find myself just looking at you
Stright on
My heart is fully in my gaze
Whether we will touch
Or just look
Whether you will desire me
Or I have just found clarity*

*Looking at you so
The girl who hid
Frightened and waiting
Twitches tickled pink
Right down to her toes.*

Naomi Barber 2004

GRIEF

Rant

The Story of O – Oh my

You don't count
I don't count you
As a husband
You were an outlier
I was a liar
Self-deception my game
How else
To promise myself
To you outlier
Prick bad worse words
Cross my mind and lips
You are a sex crime predator
Killing off female desire
Enslaving entangling
Extinguishing
To think you harvest
Female desire
Genetically hybrid
Half man half taunt
Circus in town
Riding off
In the sunset
With this one or that one
We are all your whores
Pretender to *Marat Sade*
Sadist and poseur
Snuff out the life force
Females beware
A cute Satan from
The Bronx
To woo
You appear
Lover supreme
Gathering
Starved and lonely hearts
Opening like clams
In sandy morning heat
Keep or toss
Sizing up
What can be offered up
Ambition driven appetites

Tallies assets
Racing sheet
Best horse
To advance
A well-charted course
From Bronx choirboy
To intellectual hot shot
This a page
Straight out of
The Finkler Question
He wanted to be a Jew
Like the one's who
Drove him to hives
And distraction
At City College
Bronx choirboy
Dreams to distraction
Of becoming a Jewish *intellectual*
His the queasy artistry
Nachmacherei (imitativeness)
Big leap grand quest
Stacked in bathroom
Family's sole reading material
National Inquirer
Now he reads Foucault
Gift or bait or lure
Offered up or bought him
Madness and Civilization
How apt for enraptured
Seduction via intellectual property
He rises from the mist
Feral boy to *Francophile*
Sniffing the possibility in me
The fox races after the hound dog
100% Bona fide
Upper West Side Jewess
Impatiently crazily desirous
To reside in the heartland
Of intellectual *Jewish Dom*
Unabashed eager
To put down roots
Migrate from festering
Italian Bronx
To his rightful home
I opened my door
And my heart I succumbed

Victorian like hysteria
Drove me to his side
Ex-battered wife
Promise of *fountain of youth*
To be young and in love
Weeks into being
A weak-kneed supplicant
Dragged off to cosmetic surgeon
To tighten a prematurely
Slackened jaw line
Never even noticed before
Cool-headed rainmaker
Breaks down to build up
Shape the woman
Worthy partner
As his stature grew
Je suis qui je suis (I am who I am)
I would plaintively
And weakly remind
Quid pro quo serpent lick
With each fuck
He gets one wish
And yes
Pathetic me
Sayeth yes and yes and yes
How could I
I could and I did
Say *I do*
In the *Chapel of St. James*
At the *Cathedral of St. John*
Bitter pill to swallow
Worse to acknowledge
At this poignant intersection
Of life and death
I ask and ask
How could I have
Didn't know to run
Vile man stud man
Cock sure man cock
Promised myself
To a pimp
Missed all cues
Got used up
Laughed at my age
Old lady
Sagging jaw line

Jagged jaw line
You are on the way down
I am on the way up
I was all of forty
Stud pimp
Mean mouth man
I am trying
To stop regretting you
Imagine I am seventy
Still hating you
Still hurt by you
Wasted hours wasted breath
Wasted mind and heart
Ugh! Still sting from
Your tongue-lashings
Your barbed words
Your shocking taunts
Demands outrageous really
Give me your money
I want all of your money
I am on the way up
You down
You walk wrong
You stink
You have no feminine wiles
I forbid you
From making marinara sauce (gravy)
How dare you
Serve this to me
Sacrosanct Sunday centerpiece
Family recounts doctor's visits
And making the gravy
At ritualized Sunday meals
Stud pimp
Self-promoter mediocre
Man chip on shoulder
Phony sadness
Poseur cipher (oldest son's apt description)
Fish too small and puny to keep
Yet I did
What was on my mind
He would save my youth
Awaken desire
Plump and saucy
Sexy woman passionate
Steps from frigidity and fearfulness

I would rise
From the ash
Of old intimidations
To a full womanly
Rosy Rubinesque glory
Prick bastard stud pimp
And you don't even fuck well
You don't make love
There is no love in you
Your narcissism is outsized
Even you should have
A dimmer view of you
He thinks he's Serpico
Our son says
Verging on
Heart's final beats
Need to break away
Your image your face
Your hurt
Broke my heart to bits
Can't repair itself
Despair just dessert
Queasy to confront
That last drawn breaths
Spewing hatred and regret
Raging ranting unforgiving
This the destiny I charted
Need to blot erase
Enough of you pimp stud
I picked you
Wanted to be a girl
Tossed around
I wanted to be
A woman sexy sexual
Pounding desire
Lead to foundling poseur
A predatory *Talmudic* scholar
Phony and made-up
Preying on women, me
Ripe for any embrace
Enough my dear heart
No more in this hour of seventy
In this hour of seventy
Death lurks
Want to be free
Regretting you

Feeling hurt by you
Feeling appalled
I fell in with you
Oh god
How could I
How could I
And how can I
Settle into quiet remorse
Slayer or lover
You ate up the years
I let you have them
How could I
How can I
Die without
Reconciling
Choice with need
Kindness empathy
Weak kneed girl
Bit the bait
Of supplication
Of deceit
Gambled on love
Gamboled in
Garden of first spring
You hovered
I just lay there
Dumbfounded
Captured not captivated
You spoke
With mothers mean mouth
I responded
Thankfully never submitted
To the surgeon's knife
Jaw line in tact
Appropriately slack
The spell still unbroken
I cannot die
So angry and disappointed
So aggrieved so saddened
Squandered chance for love
Dud stud prick pimp
I chose you
Longing misguided
Self-scrutiny horror won't abate
Having to reconcile with this fate.

Belle Charlotte Plessner Weiss Died – November 30, 2009

Promise me “no poems at my funeral,” she told me years ago.

In no particular order, a brief sketch of our mother:

We will miss The New Yorkers we said – a yearly gift from our mother – she renewed the subscription before her death, Bob tells me

Mother, a political activist! I am a Fabian Socialist she told me repeatedly – that before I entered kindergarten. The man in the coat factory has no coats for his children. I wouldn't take my coat off for weeks in kindergarten.

At over 50, mother joined the twenty-somethings as an Intern for Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick.

She put on her nurse's whites to serve in the medical station during the march on the Pentagon protesting the Viet Nam War.

After her brother Morris died, she went to nursing school emerging a registered nurse. There would be a bachelor's degree and two masters' degrees, classes taken well into her -50's.

Mother was a voracious reader. Tips about best reads were always forthcoming. She read three or four books a week. Mother was in a book group in her teens. “God is Not Great,” by Christopher Hitchens was what she discussed with the Rabbi who visited with her while in hospice care.

Mother-dancer, sculptor, world traveler, art lover, “we met during early morning exercises in Shanghai Square” she shared about her close Chinese friend who recently died. Russians, Israeli's Germans joined onto our lives as extended family.

Who can forget Mother dancing at family events? She was the first on the floor and the last to leave. Hora was invented for her.

There was the art group, the folk dance group – posses of enduring relationships. El Greco fixed in my mind at 6 or 7 prints on loan scattered about the house for the monthly art group meeting she hosted – went on for more than twenty-five years.

And then there were original recitations given at many an event. Father would accompany her on his fiddle. At Frank's grandma, Nan's 80th birthday she sang umpteen original verses to the tune of O Sloe Mio – they were stunned. Replays of that performance played each year on the anniversary of Nana's death.

Mother of the Great Depression it hung like a shadow Mother daughter of immigrants – it turned like a knife juxtaposed between both worlds. Judaism haunted permeated a prism for her place in the present and the past.

The eight angels her eight great grand children each held closely as infants as she sang the Yiddish lullaby *Oyfinprepitshik*. All the fixings of Hanukah, she brought with her each year for latkes and dreidle. Jewish customs relished. Her love of Jewish custom and ceremony honored deep in the bosom of the extended Plessner family. Honored as titular head. She came home to her heart think in the bosom of this her true family. Joanie she would often say was her “other daughter” she bragged about all of the accomplishments of Carol, Joan, Ira and Marsha’s children.

I remember her in her starched nurse’s whites, cap with blue stripe, navy cape with red stain lining her registered nurse pin proudly displayed as she went off to work in a VA hospital during the World War II.

I watched as she did dishes at the sink singing *Charming Billy* and *Summertime*. How pretty! Bill, our father, would call to us with great urgency, “come come see who is her, “Beautiful Bluma!” This whenever she made an entrance he stood in wonder and awe.

“My grandmother doesn’t sit in a rocking chair,” Rebecca wrote for a school assignment in first or second grade. Remembering the time at two, she showed off making two somersaults for her grandma who promptly got on the floor and did four.

Rebecca and Jeremy went to the ocean each summer with Belle and Bill. Belle would swim deep on the crest of waves it was easy to lose sight of her as she swam in the thick of the ocean waves with strong strokes always rising above the tide.

She was always dressed like a “band box” tailored and tasteful always relaying how old the suit was and how hot it was gotten on sale.

She came to sculpting later in life never used a power tool as she broke open the marble to reveal her pieces – mostly mother’s with child but there were Rabbi’s and Shakespeare and Einstein. And who could forget the puppy crawling through a large law book with the word Justice carved on the binding. This a gift to Jeremy upon his graduation from law school.

Of all she was most proud of her class of writers each above seventy-five, many scared by the Holocaust. Words flowed like melting ice each a poet under her magic wand. She gave them a chance to tell their narrative in gorgeous prose. This students remained devoted to her many years after she taught the class.

But as I have come to see her greatest love and comfort was in the folds of the extended Plessner family all brought together at the famous Weiss Thanksgivings.

She spoke with her twin Joey two or three times a day. She came home in the last months to the Plessers'. At each Jewish holiday she was cherished, honored, revered. She spoke of each extended Plesser with fierce devotion in great detail (Max received a Bar Mitzvah gift as she was days from dying). Maxie Rebecca Morris Harold part of her every breath every day and as she came close to death she called out repeatedly to her "Momma" beautiful wonderful Eva.

Mother hard to distill her essence "Good Passage Mom" I said with my last goodbye as I kissed her forehead and Mother this is a recounting and not a poem!

Naomi Barber

How to see me remember me

Emboldened I bequeath

This image this memory

Naomi Barber



Kathe-Kollwitz

THE END