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## Everywhere, Everywhere

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Everywhere, Everywhere

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE  
STONECOAST MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING

BY

Maxene Kupperman-Guiñals

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2017

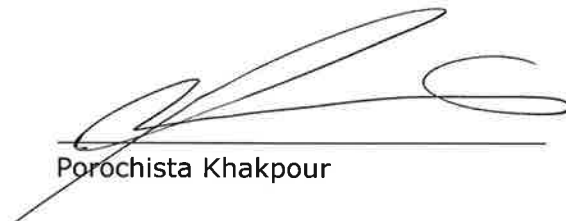
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE  
STONECOAST MFA IN CREATIVE WRITING

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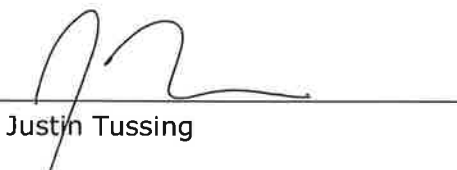
We hereby recommend that the thesis of Maxene Kupperman-Guiñals entitled *Everywhere, Everythere* be accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts.

  
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Accepted



\_\_\_\_\_  
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## **Abstract**

Food and people are arguably the poetic commonalities among us all. We eat together; we dine together, we snack together. Wherever we are on the planet, we derive pleasure from the source of our singular and communal energy. We share our food in the most intimate process: what sustains me I give to you to sustain yourself. We love when people appreciate what we have given them, and we are grateful when someone gives their food, or their poems, to us. They become expressions of love.

Food, and poetry, has a complexity of understanding and acceptance. What do we eat? Why do we eat? What do we write about? Why do we write about it? How do we love it?

Maxene Kupperman-Guiñals explores the meaning and taste of food and the connection among us when we share our nourishment. People from all over the planet are members of her family of the heart, and in her inspiration through food and family, she writes poems and creative nonfiction that commemorates her passion for all.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many people have encouraged me and assisted me in completing this MFA program. First and foremost are my mentors and the staff of Stonecoast. From Jeanne Marie Beaumont to Ted and Annie Deppe to Amanda Johnston and Porochista Khakpour, their gracious and sensitive input and editing are more than valuable. Robin Talbot always had a loving ear and warmth to give whenever I needed it. And no one would be able to function in this program without Matt Jones, who is always available with a prompt response and assistance. Justin Tussing gave me ideas when I sat with him to brainstorm.

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Finally, I thank Catherine Bambrick, Gerianne Scott, Joan Roper Adams, Ellen Garcia, Chris Sutherland, Fiordaliza Ventura, my son Seth and daughter-in-law Erin for standing with me when I could not stand alone.

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## PREFACE

### BECOMING A POET

*In the way I breathe, I am a poet.*

*In the way I teach, I am a poet.*

*In the way I travel, I am a poet.*

*In the way I speak, I am a poet.*

*In the way I eat and cook, I am a poet.*

At Stonecoast, I have continued to explore the range of my poetic nature, and I came to discover new paths and routes to becoming the poet I am.

A poet, unlike most sentient beings, breathes with a consciousness of the air, of the oxygen, of a gratitude for its purity. A poet feels intentional relief that the air exists, permeated with the reminiscent odors of ongoing existence. As a poet, I become aware of what the air feels like in my nose and in my mouth, how it fills my lungs and diaphragm, how the air makes me sparkle at the rest of the world. As a poet, I become aware of how each atom feels filling my body, and I struggle to describe the relief of available life-giving combinations of oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen and carbon dioxide. I relish the lack of poisons my air brings. My very being poetries its way into affirmation. And so, I breathe as a poet.

In 1951, my teacher read us a poem, the first time I had ever heard a poem. I didn't know if she created it or quoted it, but I remember the first lines to this day:

I used to think that snow was white

But then I saw it blue one night...

I struggled to recall the rest, but I recently looked it up online and found it: *Snow Color* by Aileen Fisher, an American children's poet popular in the 1940's-1950's.

Originally, I thought Miss Lynch must have written it herself, which taught me that a teacher could be a poet. And when I became a teacher myself, Miss Lynch and her

poem, and how we wrote our own poems in the second grade, still resided in my semi-conscious memory.

In Hebrew school, however, I discovered women could be published as poets. Although there were occasional women we studied along with the men, before that, I had almost only read American and British male poets, like Robert Louis Stevenson and James Whitcomb Riley. Emily Dickinson was an anomaly, of course, and rarely published in her lifetime. But in Hebrew school, I learned about Emma Lazarus, a woman who grew up just like me.

When we studied Emma, I was about eleven years old. I remember turning the page of a book about famous American Jews and being stunned to read of this young Jewish woman who wrote arguably one of the most famous American poems, *The New Colossus*, situated at the base of the Statue of Liberty. I felt proud and emboldened to think that someone like me could write and publish her poetry. As I wrote more and more, I felt justified for the sense of language that crept out of my soul. In retrospect, my language was often raw and unfinished.

Miss LeMoyne Goodman was another teacher who taught me the value of poetry in life and in the classroom. She was my tenth-grade English teacher, who read to us from the New Yorker, The Nation, Granta, and a variety of poetry reviews. To us, children of middle-class Americans who generally did not read these publications, she was innovative and created in me a hunger for more. In addition, she let us write throughout her class period, explaining that our words were just as important as any published author. Imagine!

Because of Miss Goodman, my students in New York City wrote and published every semester. Among other things, they wrote in their journals at the beginning of the period and could keep on writing all class because their words were as important as any published author. I wrote along with them, and we would all read some of our



writings, as little as two words or the entire poem. This taught me about the value of words to people whose voices are never shared, myself included.

The hardest part for me and for my students was revision, to revise and re-envision what our poems could be. But we struggled to change our vision, our viewpoints, our perspectives. In working gently with my students' fragile egos, I learned to work with my own. And so, I taught as a poet.

When I explore the earth and all its mysteries, the words come rushing out like the rapids in an uncharted river. In 1957, I travelled for the first time to Argentina with my paternal grandmother to visit her sister and brother and their families in Buenos Aires. Because of pogroms, they had emigrated from Russia to Argentina since the immigration gates to the United States were closed at the time. We explored the city, ventured to the outskirts, heard concerts, and I learned to speak Spanish.

As I travel more and more around the world, I uncover the secrets of each locale and strive to share them with others in my poetry and my travel essays. The people of the planet fascinate and inspire me. I have spent a great deal of time in Belgium over the last fifteen years, where I learned different, more reserved rhythms and culture. And sometimes, I experiment with writing in Dutch, a language I can write in but not pronounce.

The African market in Cabo Verde, the World War I German cemetery on the French coast, the gorgeous prostitutes in Boca Chica, the Baha'i shrine in Haifa have all offered unexpected reactions that poured out on a page. What I see and how it looks to me become words of explicability, to make sense of the world from the perspective of one person. The colors, the flavors, the styles, the very stature of the people become questions in need of answers.

I've traveled to many places, but some of my world influences exist from the people I have met right here in New York City. They are all different from me in their

backgrounds, but we are alike, too. We share our insights, our loves, our ideas, our money, our differences, our language, our food.

The wonders of the planet, whether created or natural, all inspire me to write, some in verse, some in free form, some in essays. And so, I travel, physically and emotionally, as a poet.

My words and thoughts become poetry as I rethink them and discover their music in phrases and syllables. Sometimes the printed word can make a thought appear: *how do they weigh a cloud?* I wondered after reading that some clouds can weigh a trillion tons. Rolling the words around my head and my mouth makes them real, makes them into music, makes them poetry. Sometimes they startle me, the passions of the syntax and metaphor. No raw word or phrase is unavailable in any language I've heard. Dutch, French, Hebrew, Yiddish, Spanish, English, patois: the music and rhythms treat me to a lyrical dance of phrases and sounds. Sometimes my soul can only express itself in Spanish, like when I write about my cousins or my late husband. Sometimes the emotions only feel right in *castellano*, the Castilian Spanish of Argentina or in the rhythms of Puerto Rico, my husband's homeland. And so, I think as a poet.

Cooking is also my poetry. Volumes of dinners are metaphors for love and sometimes anguish, sometimes joy. Food becomes the book I am writing with the words of savory sonnets served in soup tureens. Cinnamon becomes simile; applesauce becomes alliteration. My heart is full when I serve up hyperbole filled with fragrant herbs. My audience of dinner guests delights in the poetic language of Puerto Rican pernil, of peach lasagna, of prosecco-baked pears.

Food has always been one of the forms through which my creativity expands, and as a poet, I like to bring form to symbolic expression. What flavors can I combine to create surrealistic delight? How can I season to surprise?

As a poet, I want to give words to my vision of the world, and as a cook, I want to create flavors that give meaning to my experience of the world. Both represent the broad extent by which I embody the vastness of the places I call home, whether I have lived there or not: these United States, Puerto Rico, Belgium, Romania, the Pale of Settlement, Ireland, Argentina, Israel, Spain. These places are both in my genetic soup and in my travels. They are also in my family of choice.

My family of choice, as well as my family of birth, has given me a breadth of life. My sisters of choice are from regions around the world that have no genetic place in me: Jamaica, Guyana, Ireland, Cuba. My daughters of the heart are from the Dominican Republic and Mali. They have taught me to eat and drink and cook foods that I did not know in my growing-up years, but the sharing has broadened my global voice.

Each person has given me another flavor to savor, another type of poetry to process. And so, I cook and eat as a poet.

My birth grandparents emigrated from both Germany and the Pale of Settlement, the area of northwest Russia where Jews were forced to live since 1791. From my grandmothers, I learned to cook without formal measuring, to use my eyes and hands and tongue to get the amounts right. Much like writing poetry, the ingredients are both proscribed and surprising. Add a little nutmeg to the matzo balls the way a metaphor may delight the aural senses.

Reared at the end of World War II by parents who had struggled through the Great Depression, the expectation was that I would marry (well) and if I had to work, I would be a schoolteacher until I did marry. I didn't grow up with the encouragement that a woman could be a poet.

I wrote poetry at parties; I read books instead of playing sports. No one in my family knew much about poetry, except that it was something you studied in school and had a test at the end of the unit. But it was in my soul to write, to make

sense of the world through words and images. My few friends also wrote poetry and composed songs, each of us bonding together as the misfits we were in that community. And so, I yearned to grow up to be a poet.

I wrote in college, as a teacher, as a wife and mother. I wrote as a widow, as a disabled person, as a Jew, as a woman, as a fat person. The only way I could express myself, to make myself content, was through poetry and sometimes prose. There were occasions when I published my poems and prose, and I wished I knew how to publish more of it.

After retiring from teaching, I decided that I would work on the desires of my heart. I had always wanted to sing, to write, to perform, and I never had the courage to do so. But being diagnosed with a chronic illness, multiple sclerosis, put a time frame on my goals. What MS did was change the way I experienced my future, since I don't know how long or to what extent I will be fully functional. If not now, when?

My first goal was to sing, and I worked for two years to put together a cabaret act, which I performed on two Sunday afternoons in Manhattan to celebrate my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. I wrote a poetic playbill to accompany my performance, in which I incorporated the titles of the songs I sang. What I learned from that was the amount of work it took to make something creatively viable. And although the performance was musical, the poetry that went with it was an important statement of necessity. I needed to get those images on paper; the music, although essential to my soul, was not enough. It is my own poetry that I needed to include.

I had published poems throughout the years in a variety of journals and books, but I did not study enough to explore how to make them more precise, clearer. I also did not know how to submit my work for publication to people I did not know. Mostly it had been at the suggestion of other writers or editors that I submitted my stories and poems, but never to strangers, cold.

The first time I got paid for my creative work was exhilarating! And the second, and the third...but I still did not know how to approach publication in a professional way, and I still was too timid to entrust my work to strangers, on the chance that they would respond the way my parents had: with derision and dismissal. I continue to struggle against those voices, and Stonecoast has helped me learn what to do with them.

The process has been slow for me, deliberate in the small steps I take. I first took a local writing class in rural Massachusetts, where I have a vacation house, and I discovered a voice I could speak in front of adult strangers. This was serious work for me, unlike some of the others in the class: I wanted to stretch my capacity for the imagery. I experimented with sonnets and villanelles for the first time and discovered that writing within parameters was both freeing and rigid. When I read my poems aloud in the class each week, I got positive feedback. This class taught me to begin to trust my poetic voice to other ears.

It was time for me to study more rigorously, but I knew I didn't want to leave home to be a full-time student. No way I could see myself ensconced in a dorm and classroom, hanging out at the statue in the quad. Indeed, I had been a teacher for 35 years, and I would have to change my role in the classroom as well. How hard would that be, going from facilitator to learner?

When I found Stonecoast, I was thrilled and scared. Suppose that voice in my head was telling the truth? I struggled to accept that this program would not have included me if I did not show some promise, if I had no talent. Another struggle from being teacher to becoming student: how did I perceive my own students' ability, and would my teachers be as encouraging to me?

One issue, of course, are the voices inside my head that tell me I have no right to be a poet. I recognize those several voices, and I try to dismiss them. Stonecoast has helped me put them in their place.

In all, I have learned from everyone I have been in contact with at Stonecoast, and I am grateful for all my lessons.

When I first was accepted to Stonecoast, I met Jeanne Marie Beaumont, who came to my apartment and chatted for a few hours, putting me at my ease to be with a cohort of writers both published and not, all of whom would respect my work efforts. Because she lives not far from me, we have become regular lunch mates. Besides being the sensitive and discerning teacher for my first workshop at Stonecoast, she was my third-semester mentor. A better mentor I could not have had for this project. I am diligent with proofreading and grammar; she is pristine. What I learned from her was that reading over and over was not enough; sometimes it is right to have another set of eyes. These eyes could discover heretofore unseen fireworks.

I had to leave my first residency early because my mother died the morning of the second half. Robin Talbot was generous in her time and gentleness, sitting with me and listening to plans I had to make and changes I had to endure. What I learned from Robin was that generosity of spirit is a hallmark of this program. It is my way to complete assignments efficiently and early; having the leeway to mourn while getting my work done was sacred.

Robin assigned me to my first mentor, sight unseen: Ted Deppe. We Skyped a few times, since he is in Ireland, and I learned what a generous poet and mentor he is. With Ted, I experimented with forms and languages, with word choice and subject matter. With Ted, I realized the concept of audience: what I write about also depends upon who is reading. In a poem included here called "Some Mornings I Am Fatly Beautiful," we discussed the use of the word "Ozymandian." Ted sees Ozymandias as a tragic Shelley character, reduced to dust; I see him as a huge persona straddling two ports with his legs and therefore magnificent. The word "colossal" has negative connotations for my audience of beautiful fat women.

In the program, we are encouraged to communicate with each other as often as necessary. When I heard that Ted and his wife Annie were doing a poetry reading in Massachusetts, I attended with some friends. He asked me afterwards what I wanted to do with my writing. No one had ever asked me that before, and I could not answer. But it has been the question that has driven my work ever since. Even now, it is hard for me to admit that I would like to publish a book of poetry and another of my travel writings. (Those voices die hard!)

In workshops during residencies, I learned about technique and attitude. Because the general atmosphere here is that of enriching assistance rather than harsh criticism, I learned to grow as a poet. I didn't always agree with what my colleagues said, but I always appreciated their time and effort. My favorite workshop was with Martín Espada. He allowed us to write during the classes and then read to each other our products. We produced poems in a discrete time frame. Some of those poems are in this thesis: "A Principled Statement on Poetry" and "The Bilingual Para."

I took two workshops during residencies that were "Writing About Race." Both workshops were valuable, and they both forced me to confront what hidden biases I have that show up in my work. Because I live in a very diverse world, I am always interested in going further, of releasing new lessons. In the first workshop, I wrote a two-part poem about the riots in Baltimore, in two voices. Although I had read them to my sisters, both of who are of African descent, among the comments I got in that first one was that writing in dialect had died with Mark Twain. But Ntozake Shange writes in vernacular, thereby raising the question of whether I as a white woman can emulate her style. What gives me the right to write what I hear?

In the second "Writing About Race" workshop, David Anthony Durham and Amanda Johnston were the teachers. All of us students were white women; both of them identify as Black. In her notes to us, Amanda cited some truths that

reverberate in me: "Race refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant, while ethnicity refers to shared culture such as language, ancestry, practices and beliefs." I don't think I'd ever questioned the differences between the two quite as starkly; even now, I am hard-pressed to continue to parse the meanings. As a Jewish woman in America today, I look "white," but my ethnicity is not shared by the vast majority of Americans. What does that say to me in terms of my identity? And so, I explore in my poems who I am in terms of ethnicity and maybe not so much about race, since I don't live in Germany of the 1930's-40's, when Judaism was considered a race to be eradicated.

Another aspect of being at Stonecoast was the number of books of poetry and prose I got to read. In some ways, these were assignments; in more valuable ways, they were pleasures of which to partake like an extravagant feast. I chose to focus on the women, and I found some about whom I did not know enough; I found Grace Paley, a woman like myself in background, heritage and politics. I found Nikki Giovanni, who spoke her love poems courageously. I found women troubadours of 14<sup>th</sup> century France, heretofore unsung and anonymous. I found Claudia Rankine and Lola Ridge and Judith Ortiz Cofer and Rhina Espaillat, all poets I had never had the luxury either of teaching or reading. Most notable was Ruth Irupé Sanabria, an Argentine Jewish poet married to a Puerto Rican man and living in New Jersey. She checks off virtually all the boxes of my life, and discusses them in her poems, especially "On the Bird That Interrupted Our Mate and Pastelillos de Guayaba." Mate is the national drink of Argentina and pastelillos are small fried turnovers of Puerto Rico, both of which are important parts of my personal cuisine. My mentors were generous and knowledgeable with their suggestions. I became less afraid.

Semester after semester, my voice and daring became stronger. I developed a strength to be vulnerable, and when Ted didn't understand about being "fatly beautiful," I shared with him "in private I cry," which is something fat women do not



necessarily share with thin people. I could write about my mother, about my lovers, about my Judaism. Although I have benefitted from academics during my life as a student, Stonecoast has given me this courage. And for this, I am grateful.



**Everywhere, Everywhere**



## **KEN BURNS IGNORES MY EMMA**

*After watching his PBS Special on the Statue of Liberty*

Really, Ken Burns?  
Nothing about Emma, who lives in my soul?  
Ken Burns, your words and pictures might be the only facts  
some people may know:  
How could you neglect her name?  
Our statue of Liberty Enlightening the World, she has no name, she has no sword...  
She has a poem at her feet,  
Birthed by my first poetwoman.

When I was a child, I knew the poetry of men:  
Walter de la Mare, James Whitcomb Riley, Sholom Aleichem.  
Men wrote poems, men published each other's words.  
But somewhere inside me  
a small poet lived,  
silent and confused,  
with no way for her words to emerge.

And then in Hebrew School, one drowsy Wednesday afternoon,  
in some book chronicling activities of  
famous and diligent Jewish Americans (mostly men),  
we read about the poem at the feet of our Statue of Liberty,  
the Lady Lighting the Harbor,  
the New Colossus:  
written by a woman!  
I awoke from my Hebrew School stupor  
to Emma Lazarus,  
my girl, having lived my dream,  
and Jewish like me  
and middle class like me  
and a daughter like me  
and a New Yorker,

MY EMMA

Wrote this most famous sonnet on a statue.

"Give me your tired, your poor," Emma wrote,  
And lifted a lamp for me beside a golden door to let me breathe free.

My Emma, a mighty woman with a torch, taught me poetic potential.  
My Emma lit my soul with the flame of her words in my world;  
MY EMMA welcomed me with the map of where I want to be.

And Ken Burns, you could not take the 1.23 seconds it would have taken to  
say....slowly even!...

"Written by Emma Lazarus, a middle-class New York Jew."

My Emma. My Emma:

Why did I even begin to think that I could be a poet, a writer?

Emma is the reason.

## **FOR ALL**

A coterie of poets  
earnest and passionate,  
parse each other's poems  
and howl at their syntax,  
their (lack of) appropriate  
Imagery.

A lady in her suburban house,  
between cleaning the toilet  
and polishing the dining room table,  
sits down with a cup of tea  
or glass of wine  
and peruses her women's magazine  
for an inspiration  
from a poet who reflects her  
Life.

An out-of-work steelworker,  
after mowing the lawn of his elderly neighbor,  
looks for a Hallmark birthday card  
for his lover  
who never finished eleventh grade  
But likes  
Poems.

The black-and-white photographer,  
forced to find 35-mm film on the Internet  
because everything is digital now,  
happens upon a book with  
poems and pictures,  
and both satisfy her yearning for  
a past that cannot exist in  
Print.

The New York Times magazine,  
in an effort to seem literary,  
begins a weekly column  
of relevant poetry,  
designed to be read by  
those of us aspiring intellectuals  
for whom poetry  
seems like what one must  
Read.

Poetry sneaks into lives like  
necessary spiders;  
little metrical legs  
wrapped into dreams  
of rhythm or rhyme  
and surprising verbiage,  
Ubiquitous.



## **BLACKHOLE**

Rushing toward nothing,  
Strong sounds have burned away.

Words don't come,  
no oxygen,  
no light.

No similes slide down the trajectory;  
No metaphors meet me on the way to some unachievable star.

I see the distant wordstars, far into future space,  
Lightyears from my voice  
unreachable in my write time,  
transparent ghostly wisps,  
no sense memories throttle  
the igniter in my brain.

Heavy words weigh down in the black hole.  
Blasters fruitless in a dark, arid vacuum,  
and transcendence doesn't come.

## **A PRINCIPLED STATEMENT ON POETRY**

I am not sure I have the courage to be a poet:

I don't presume to prophesy  
the future in bat guano or a gnat's eyes.

I can't always tell if my students will grow up to be queen or choir,  
Queer or quiet, querulous or quack.

Would I face a rifling squad to brandish others' sounds, others' wounds?

Could I attend my own beheading in prideful dignity?

I'd like to think yes, but I'd probably shit my pants first, and sob.

Never faced down a mob of hate-filled mongers,  
intent on my death for my words of truthful wisdom.

And if I had,

Would I have run?

Not enough words in my arsenal to pronounce lofty commitments of protest

for the misappropriated and disbelieved.

I listen to the anguished appeal to hear.

I don't think I can be a poet, no.

How do I face my commitment to the world through my words?

How do I lead the armies of the mute

swans and geese?

Who has time for that when you are facing a rifle squad?

My poetsoul yearns, though, and weeps.

I cry for those who have no tears left.

(I wonder what colossal fires their past tears have extinguished  
to create these sere eyes.)

## WE BECOME THANKSGIVING

Will the *gringa* eat our *comida*? Will the Jew eat *treyfe*? Will the vegan taste the chicken soup? Who will eat *mosselen met fritten*?

Freed from our separation, our words become prayer. Aloud together, we enter our parts into our whole: I am you: the Celt, the Guyanese, the Jamaican, *de Vlaamse*, *la boricua*, *las quisqueyanas*, the Jew, the world. You are me: the world, the Jew, *las quisqueyanas*, *la boricua*, *de Vlaamse*, the Jamaican, the Guyanese, the Celt.

*We are we are we are we are we*

Our palms hold gifts of our own origins: *habichuelas* and *lukschen*, pepper pot and curry goat, mussels and *práitáí* laid as sacred supplications on the consecrated table.

the banana the okra the chicken neck the shell the rice the broth the bean

And we serve our celebration, our rituals, from each to each: our chicken soup with *mandln*, our *chicharrón con maduros*, our green beans stewed with smoked pork knuckle. We begin our *Ghentse waterzooi*, our boiled cabbage and gammon, our *arroz moro*. We add our ambrosia, our *babka*, our *helado de coco*, our *speculoos*.

We create our faith from the pantries of our hearts.

*Amenamenamenamename:*

ours is known to us, sweet sustenance.

## FRIDAY NIGHTS RUN LIKE TRAINS OR SNAILS

**1952:** Eight years old. I learn to set the Sabbath table with a white cloth and linen napkins and the brass candlesticks my grandmother sneaked out of Vitebsk Guberniya, the Russian shtetl where she was born.

My mother inserts new white 4" Shabbat candles and closes her eyes, bringing with her arms 3 ingatherings of the holy Sabbath Queen with the lighting of the candles. She welcomes the quietness of the Shabbat 26 hours, during which only she & I will do anything that, if a man did it for pay, would be considered work, since only men's real work is banned, but the chopped liver and the golden chicken soup with *lukschen* and the roast chicken with perhaps broccoli or string beans and some form of potato or *kugel* will not serve themselves. The tea must be poured and the homemade cake sliced and arranged on a lovely crystal platter (grapes, maybe, or slices of melon, depending on the season) and then the dishes cleared, washed, dried and put away. Our work doesn't really count as work, because it is in the service of family and God, although only sometimes in that order.

My father arrives from his store, and he removes his everyday sport coat and tie to become a clone of King David in his special Shabbat jacket that might have been called a smoking jacket if I had lived in some other household full of wealthy goyim. He presides over dinner in his big chair in the dining room where we eat only on Friday nights. The other nights' dinners are all 5 of us squeezed into the dinette, which might have been called a breakfast nook in some other culture of most likely richer white goyim.

**1960:** Some time in my teens, I go over to Helene Mayer's house while her parents are in shul and make out with some boy long since forgotten, even what he smelled like, those kisses in a darkened living room.

Helene and I are supposed to be studying for our confirmation 2 days away on a spring Sunday morning, when our parents will beam their pleased smiles at their beautiful Jewish daughters beginning their adult Jewish steps into the expected Jewish fold, when eventually they will marry successful Jewish doctors, or lawyers, if worse should come to worse--*pffft, pffft, pffft!*--and give them beautiful Jewish children (preferably 3, in any 2-sex permutation) and live in a gorgeous house maybe in Short Hills, which would actually be quite lovely if it weren't in fact restricted. But maybe one day they will let Jews in, because who knows, things could

change, although Millburn or Livingston are both steps forward...anywhere, actually, in suburban Essex County. Urban Newark or Irvington would be a step backwards and nobody should be forced to step backwards, especially the children and the grandchildren.

**1962:** The truth is I love Newark and want to live there, maybe on Baldwin Avenue with my grandparents or Keer Avenue with my Aunt Lucy, whose daughter I should have been. There, in private or two-family houses built before the 1920's, you could walk to Avon Avenue or Bergen Street and people know you, know whose child you were, know how much money you bring to spend for a 3 Musketeers, or a quart of Borden's milk. Or even a striped silk shirtwaist or white A-line dress with grey lace trim for a special occasion like your graduation or confirmation, from the shop where Aunt Minnie has a charge account.

**1963:** I hide out smoking with Pam (or maybe she is Pat, but she is very blonde and Nordic looking--a real anomaly to my Semitic brain where I am the only blondie with a small nose who could pass for Christian if need ever be again in the future) in the stairwell in the newest dorm on campus, discussing the loss of virginity and whether you had really experienced an orgasm from the feel of your boyfriend's dick (and my virginal self lies and says my orgasm lasted 2 or 3 minutes).

Glenda explains that maryjane lives in the pretend giant cardboard replica of a Wrigley's spearmint gum box over her mirror in her room. Finally, in exasperation, she explains to the naive me who maryjane is (and I am appalled--only the first of many things to be appalled at and then an eager participant in).

**1967:** LSD and what I hope is wild sex. The colors as I walk through the campus of Boston College sing, and the sky tastes like pearls. John pretends to be concerned and hip. There is no sex, though, with him.

**1970:** All I want is unchallenging television shows after a challenging week as a young new New York City junior high school teacher before I hang up the week's clothes and melt into my bed to start some dictator's idea of developmental lesson plans, because they were absolutely mandated in format then--with motivation, aim, pivotal questions, summary and homework for each lesson of each day. All I want is

a boyfriend to take me out to a glamorous dinner in the glamorous part of Manhattan.

But it never happens, and I have no boyfriend or anything to do but watch Jeopardy and Room 222 and get ready for back to work on Monday. Friday nights are reserved for phone summarizations of the week with Ellen or Dossy or Edna in gossip and analyzation of those with whom we work, especially particularly sexy and out of reach guys while I cook chicken and perhaps string beans or broccoli and potato for dinner, which I eat at my square table, not set with a white linen tablecloth nor lovely brass candlesticks nor the good dishes and silverware, but with the regular everyday crockery and the regular everyday cutlery and the regular everyday glass, and although the food is reminiscent of my childhood's meal, the only resemblance is in the ingredients, not even the preparation, which is far more exotic than my mother ever dreamed of.

## **PARA MIS PRIMAS, SO FAR AWAY**

de vez en cuando  
debo tomar un maté  
porque necesito  
el amor de  
mis primas  
tan lejos de mis abrazos  
en la Argentina

en mi corazón  
en un abismo negro  
lleno de nada  
añoro las sonrisas  
que hacen "sunrise."

y las dos, una mi gemela  
y una mi querida,  
me darían un maté  
con el azúcar de sus besos.

sometimes  
I need a cup of maté  
because what I really need  
is the love of  
my cousins  
so very far from my embrace  
in Argentina

in my heart  
in this black abyss  
filled with nothing  
I long for their smiles  
to create the sunrise.

and the two of them, one my twin  
and one my beloved,  
will give me a maté  
sweetened by their kisses.

## **INDULGENCES**

Today, I ate things:

Brown and white and red delectables,  
Crispy moist satin morsels,  
Pleasure things to sustain my heart...

Today, I danced:

Purple juicy deliciousness,  
High-heeled boot shimmies,  
Sequined-legging sinuousness to delight my mind...

Today, I sang:

Deep brown velvet to my mouth,  
Orchid jasmine to my throat,  
Motown to my belly to celebrate my body...

Today, I reveled:

Sybaritic cocoon and nest  
Chocolate duvet and silken pillow  
Caribbean bath and embrace to luxuriate my character...

Today, I drank:

Orchestrally caloric creams,  
C sharp and A minor,  
Plenitude to enhance my soul.



## MY SINGULAR PATH TO JOY

Littered by *eppes essen*,  
something Jewish to eat,  
I walked straight into rye bread and butter,  
bagels and cream cheese.  
Chicken soup with eggy noodles was my comfort station.

There were stopping places on my path,  
comfortable seats where I sat with brisket and pastrami sandwiches,  
benches with ripe tomatoes and succulent corn,  
leaning trees where I ate applesauce and potato pancakes.

On my singular path, there came Francisco.  
Together we diverged south  
onto his Puerto Rico,  
onto his green, cilantro-scented island  
where everything was rusty gold  
and the blue sea and the man  
enveloped my heart in warmth

unknown on my past highway.  
The caresses I garnered from  
both man and *comida*  
sustained my soul and my body:  
he created sidewalk *quioscos* to rest.

On my new life path  
he shared his Puerto Rican *comida*.  
He stopped to treat me to unknown hills of rice and red beans.  
We parked along roads, snacking on sweet golden *plátanos* and garlicky *ropa vieja*,  
soft *pan de agua* from the bakery  
and rivers of sweet/tart *maví* from the roadside,  
hillocks of *yuca con cebollas rojas*.

On my singular life path littered with *eppes essen*,  
no one had ever introduced me to  
                    either roast *lechón* or Christmas  
                    and cafe con leche every morning.  
My path was becoming an avenue.

In exchange,  
on his life path,  
I gave him constancy and sweetly spiced *kugel*.

He craved, my brown protection,  
mounds of fat blueberries I had known.  
Smooth pavements of cream cheese and lox became his,  
Grandma Rose's gefilte fish with hot horseradish,  
gravy lakes with islands of chewy pot roast with onions and carrots.

Our paths conjoined, as did our food,  
and our son,  
Our Puerto Rican Jewish son,  
travels without toll along parkways  
of roasted chicken with *maduros*,  
Malta India with honeycake.

## **SOME MORNINGS I AM FATLY BEAUTIFUL**

Some mornings  
I am fatly beautiful.  
I glisten from the shower,  
oil my silk skin,  
shake and shimmy my luxuriousness.

Some mornings  
the mirror looks back to inform me  
I am fatly the most beautiful in all the land.

Some mornings  
my Ozymandian thighs  
are golden pedestals wrapped in purple tights.

### *Exultation:*

My sybaritic corpulence,  
My majesty and opulence,  
My soft and sumptuous splendor,  
My glamorous girth:  
gifts to the multitudes who welcome the visual feast I am.

My imperial glory,  
My beneficence,  
My elegant magnitude

I generously bestow on a world  
that may not recognize my gracious goodness.

Some mornings  
my black suede boots and multicolored tunic,  
long eyelashes and lush mouth,  
full hair and oversized Ray-Bans

leave me breathless in their total drop-dead fashion sense and style.

I don my black velvet royal wrap,  
pick up a coordinating cane from the bin  
and fatly slip out the door  
to my myriad minions of admirers,  
who recognize that  
I am the model of morning gorgeousness

## **TO THE SIZE 4 WOMAN WHO ONLY HAS MY HEALTH AT HEART**

You eat well and work out.

I eat well and work out.

You wear flattering clothes.

I wear flattering clothes.

You brush and floss twice a day.

I brush and floss twice a day.

You get compliments on your good shape.

I get no compliments on my good shape.

We shop in the same supermarket, once a week,

And I see you scrutinizing my cart for contraband.

There is none: no cookies cake chips ice cream bacon sausage.

In your cart there are potato chips and Oreos, alas!

But no one tells you about how much healthier you'd be without them;

No one tells you to put back the cheese dip.

You look at me with fake concern.

I see it in your eyes.

You're relieved you don't look like me.

Moral:

It would be as hard for you to look like me

As it would be for me to look like you.

## **NO ONE WANTS TO BE SIZE 16**

For small women, size 16 is the end.  
Just one step to not eating ever again,  
to shame,  
to shopping in special stores where the clothes aren't cute or fashionable,  
to being ridiculed and derided,  
a far cry from never thin enough.

For fat activists, it isn't big enough to show off,  
size 16 is still small.  
Now, size 28! There you go!  
You have a statement to make,  
a superhighway body  
frowned on by the narrow two-lanes  
and rich in geography.

Size 16 ain't nuthin'  
but dry runway between desert and oasis.

## **AND SOME NIGHTS I CRY**

Some nights,  
I morosely look in the mirror through the eyes of some other.  
Nothing ever will make me beautiful in the eyes of that other,  
and in private I cry.

My eyes now see the fat flesh their eyes see:  
the ugly corpulent ripples they decry,  
the flaccid unhealthiness of me,  
the unforgiven fat insult with which I blight their landscape,  
and in private I cry.

They reprimand me; no tasty things for my dinner:  
broiled tilapia with the lemon wedge of guilt,  
green salad seasoned with apologetic vinegar.  
This is my eternal Eucharist, forever guilty of offending  
and in private I cry.

They demand I grovel in pathetic acts of contrition, plead my guilt to them;  
they win the pageant of acceptance, not me.  
I hate their dull judgmental eyes, their snarky need to make me repulsive,  
and in private I cry.

Some nights,  
I angrily grab handfuls of my huge belly,  
the flabby layers permanently slathered onto my obese back  
and fat arms with a trowel,  
this hanging flesh,  
these mountainous thighs,  
these pendulous grotesque breasts,  
and in private I cry.

Nothing will make me beautiful, not ever,  
so in private I cry.

## **I USED TO BE BEAUTIFUL**

People asked my advice on  
how to be as beautiful as I was.

I used to be clever,  
others said.

People asked my advice on  
knotty problems only I could uncurl.

I used to be helpful.

Clapped the erasers, explained 5-paragraph exposition,  
gave shelter to the needy.

I used to be sexy,  
I remember.

People envied my sexy self-assurance,  
my flirty easy attitude.

I used to be



## **DE WARMSTE PLAATS**

The warmest place  
in your house  
is  
our bed,  
under the grey and yellow comforter you bought,  
our heads on the IKEA pillows I bought.  
We love here.

De warmste plaats  
in je huis  
is  
ons bed,  
onder de grijze en gele dons die je gekocht hebt,  
onze hoofden op de IKEA kussens die ik kocht.  
Hier vrijen we.

## **NIGHT WHEN**

*3 a.m. when it happens:*

you are not here,  
and my foot has nothing to touch  
but the cold sheet

*4 a.m. when it happens:*

you are not here,  
and my hand has nothing to touch  
but the underside of the pillow

*5 a.m. when it happens:*

you are not here,  
and my lips have nothing to touch  
but each other

*6 a.m. when it happens:*

you are not here,  
and my hips have nothing to touch  
but the air

## **LOOKING UP THROUGH MEMORY'S EYES AT THOSE LIPS**

Oh, I remember your lips  
against my lips:  
    (Like pillows, they were)  
I could be in those lips forever.

Oh, your lips, I remember,  
stayed on my lips:  
    (Soft, insistent)  
addicted to mine, those lips.

Oh, your lips! I remember  
basking in those lips,  
    (Deep, full, dark)  
comforted by their eternity.

Oh! Those lips I remember:  
scarred, branded, tattooed  
    (Fired memory, those lips)  
over eons, I was, by those lips.

## **NOT TODAY, NOT AT ALL**

No, I do not miss you at all this morning.

Nope, not at all. This morning, awakening in the sunlight,  
I did not miss your smile  
or your arms, gathering me close to you for morning kisses.

I did not miss  
your legs and feet touching mine throughout the night.

I did not miss myriad kisses,  
not at all, no, I didn't.

I did not miss your eyes, looking deep into mine,  
yelling feelings you cannot say aloud.

And I do not miss the sound of your voice  
or your gaze over coffee,  
and eating bagels together at an insecure table:

Nope, I don't miss you this morning.

Don't miss a comfortable resting place  
on your body,  
the rough wrinkle nor the smooth  
sometimes sticky silk

And I certainly don't miss  
a yelping little loving dog,  
wanting only to give slobbery kisses and bony hugs  
and get his breakfast and any treats he can muster

Nope, I cannot imagine missing you  
this sunny morning.

I do not miss the touch of your hand.

I do not miss what emanates from your skin,  
your lips,  
your pores.

No, I do not miss you at all this morning.

## **DESIRE**

the touch of a silken pink peony  
entwined with wild crimson roses  
in the garden night

At 3 a.m.

all I want is

a foot

against my foot

rooted in the earthy sheets

## THE RED STAR LINE MUSEUM, SEPTEMBER 2015

*Over two million people came to America from Europe on Red Star Line ships between 1860-1920. They were tested in Antwerp by American doctors and officials because if they were turned back at Ellis Island, the shipping line had to pay for their return passage.*

### **I stand in line (eyes down), STATION ONE, ADMISSIONS:**

Here is your number.

It is on your baggage, too, being cleaned and disinfected.

Step to the right, in there.

Take off your clothes, all of them.

(You'll get them back after they are cleaned and disinfected.)

Here is soap and a towel.

Get cleaned and disinfected in that shower.

Come out in an hour.

### **I stand in line (eyes down) STATION TWO, CLERK:**

What language do you speak?

What number are you?

Where do you come from?

*Hmmm. Hmmm.*

Is all your paperwork in order?

Do you have your passport?

### **I stand in line (eyes down), STATION THREE, DOCTOR:**

Age?

Religion?

Race?

Height? Weight?

Do you have pink eye?

Do you have lice?

Do you have marks on your skin?

*Hmmm. Hmmm.*

Have you ever had whooping cough?

Can you hear?

Can you see?

Deformed? Crippled?

howtallareyouhowmanychildrenwerestillborntoyou

Do you have lice?

Do you cough? Do you have tuberculosis?

*Hmmm. Hmmm.*

Are you pregnant?

whatsthatonyourskin?

Take this paper with you...

**I stand in line (eyes down), STATION FOUR, SECRETARY:**

Have you ever been married?

Where is your spouse?

Are you a polygamist?

Are you an anarchist?

Have you lived in an almshouse? A prison?

Are you insane? Mentally defective?

*Hmmm. Hmmm.*

Have you had sex with anyone here in Antwerp?

Have you ever been arrested by the police?

When? For what?

Do you want to kill any Americans?

Why are you leaving your country?

*Take this paper with you...*

**I stand in line (eyes down), STATION FIVE, BURSAR:**

Do you have money? How much?

Do you have your ticket? How did you pay for it?

Do you carry any weapons? Anything illegal to America?

What can you do? What is your trade? Are you prepared to work?

Can you read? Can you write?

*Hmmm. Hmmm.*

Do you know any English?

Who is meeting you in America?



Where are you going in America?

Do you take your tools?

*Take this paper with you...*

**I stand in line (eyes down), STATION SIX, ENSIGN:**

Name and address of a relative in your country.

Where do you stay here in Antwerp?

Where do you eat?

**I stand in line (eyes down), STATION SEVEN, BURSAR'S ASSISTANT:**

Who is the current president of the United States?

What form of government is there?

What colors are the flag?

What is the national anthem?

What are the thirteen original colonies?

Who freed the slaves?

**I stand in line (eyes raised), STATION EIGHT, JUDGEMENT:**

We have all your answers and tests we will determine

Tomorrow.

You will get a letter where you are staying

The next day.

*Ship leaves next week.*

## **GENERATIONS**

I never asked the necessary questions:

Who were your parents?

Where did they come from?

Why did they let you come here?

I wasn't offered any stories, either.

I overheard some occasional information:

We came because it was America.

We came for the opportunity.

I came for my education.

No one ever talked about the trials of a new country.

They offered:

We had no money in those days.

It was cold in our apartment.

We didn't have a lot of clothes.

And when I complained, I heard nothing, except:

We came for you.

We endured for you.

We could not complain then, there.

And I knew:

To America, they came so I could speak.

To America, they came so I could eat, be warm, be clothed.

To America, they came so I could speak.

I could

    speak.

                    I would speak.

## **MY TWO GRANDFATHERS**

Both my grandfathers chose Max.  
When each came to the United States,  
he considered a name in English.  
Mendel became Max;  
Moses became Max.

Invisible Grandpa Max, who died when my mother was two,  
was born Mendel Rosenbaum in Polotsk.  
He was reborn as Max  
when he was thirty and came through Ellis Island.

Loving Grandpa Max, who died when I was eleven,  
was born Moses Kuppermann in Karlsruhe.  
He was reborn as Max Kupperman  
when he was three and came through Ellis Island.

How many gestations seemed to end on Ellis Island  
where rebirths were fast and sacred?

## **MY GRANDPA'S RING**

I am named for my Grandpa Max,  
the one who died of a heart attack when my mother was two,  
not Grandpa Max, my father's father, who died when I was eleven.  
I grew up in his embrace.

My mother would promise me her things, "after."  
I made it clear to her that I wanted nothing of hers,  
only what was heritage  
from her mother and her sisters.

When my mother died at age 96, I looked through her dainty jewelry.  
My cousins and my brothers were uninterested in her valuables.

She had some treasures:  
her father's gold watch chain,  
her sister's bangle bracelet,  
her mother's tiny pearl pins.

I took the watch chain that had been made into bracelets  
and Grandma Rose's pins that I would never wear.

And then a gold ring,  
a man's signet ring, with initials carved into the face of it.  
I tried to decipher what the initials were:  
There is an M, but the rest scrolls unclear:  
K for Kupperman? Or R for Rosenbaum?

It fit my right forefinger.

If it was Grandpa Max, my mother's father,

For the first time in 94 years,

The ring has a home.

If it belonged to Grandpa Max, my father's father,

I can feel his embrace once more.

**BELONGING TO A SORORITY NO ONE WANTS TO PLEDGE.**  
**December 2014**

My mother joined my sorority last week.  
Her dues are tears coming up out of her knees.  
No one wants to belong to this sorority,  
this black sash, rent clothing, ashen-faced sorority of women  
all of whom would be glad if it were the day before the  
initiation.

Dues are paid only once;  
the hazing is a hot poker through the heart.

This single bond between my mother and me still does not bridge our empathy;  
I am in graduate school, and she wants to drop out.  
I was conscripted after 22 years; she, after 72.

My mother and I hate our membership,  
And the other women in our chapter are not,  
By and large, empathic.  
They resent the late entry of my mother.  
She wasn't in the classes to find out what to do,  
and  
she cannot even hear her sisters.

# MARATHON

Here is my dead mother,  
racing after my dead father,  
the 2-month marathon more than she could endure.

Panting, she got to the finish line,  
just after her husband,  
as usual,  
glad-handed  
all the important folks  
and prepared the table before her.

Here is my dead mother,  
once cold in her corporeal home,  
relieved that she finally touched the bottom  
of her chasm of  
loneliness,  
back into her safety zone,  
at some celestial dining table set with the plate and cup  
my father placed for her.

These last few years,  
roles reversed,  
she no longer could do  
so, therefore,  
didn't.

Came in second,  
quieter,  
readier,  
deeper.

## **YOU CAN ONLY KEEN ALONE**

far from the eyes and ears  
of people who depend  
upon your silent efficiency

You labor a transparent scream,  
a moaning wraith  
conceived low in your soles,  
incubating up your legs,  
gestating in your gut,  
filling your belly and hips.  
Your lungs roar,  
your throat expands like a cervix  
to expel the emergent grief.

The afterdeath:  
a lament never expressed before,  
one that quakes in your larynx,  
no pitch,  
crescendo to quadruple forte  
perhaps the key of O minor

ostinato takes a bow  
begin again



## **MY MOTHER**

My mother was an unopened flower,  
Still furled long after it should have bloomed.

She was the night that had stars behind clouds,  
Glowing richly unseen.

She was the music on records that had no turntable,  
Vivaldi and Rachmaninoff silenced.

She was the storm that raged in a cave,  
Rain pouring down not enriching any garden.

She was the laughter of bitter peaches,  
September's harvest turned to December's meal.

She was the morning when the sun rose grey,  
Dim and unnoticed without warmth.

She was the reason that hope chests exist,  
The heartfelt collector of others' treasures.

She was the reason that my mind is violet-grey,  
Lavender of late-scented flavors.

## **MANHATTAN COLOR CODE**

In Manhattan everything comes in shades of black.  
Ebony and charcoal and onyx.  
Roadways and sidewalks compete in shades of grey.  
The only visible white is on a cloudy day.

The official New York uniform is black.

I have nine black sweaters and one grey,  
Six pairs of black jeans,  
Black boots  
and black coats.

For enhancement, black scarves complete the ensemble.  
Occasionally a brave soul dons a red coat,  
Or blue jeans.

She might be mistaken for a tourist, though.

## NY GEOGRAPHY IN A HOT MINUTE

Brooklyn's full of crooks, and  
The Bronx don't get no banks.  
Staten Island's got a ferry;  
Manhattan's in a giant hurry.  
Queens anonymous, they say,  
NYC is just too cray.

Z train's gone; the G is slow.  
West Side 1,2,3 you go.  
Jersey's west; Lon Guyland's east.  
On LIE the traffic ceased.  
Lady Lib just doesn't speak.  
Park Ave peeps think their shit don't stink,  
In Rocky Center, 50 bucks'll  
Let you skate, show off your muscle.

Mermaids march on Coney I,  
Bombers win or else they die.  
Mets fans used to cheer at Shea  
Then Citi Field became the name.  
JFK and LGA have planes  
to get you in the ai  
remember, if your flight's at 8  
leave at noon, cuz there's a spate  
of cars far as yer eyes can see  
on every bridge and the BQE.

Peaceful glades at Bronx Botan  
ical Gardens; helado man  
Selling coco or bluish icees,  
Rollerbladers avoiding crises.  
In Staten I, you think there's farm  
But you can get a great veal parm.

You really try to get a cab,  
When 6 little preppies stand and gab  
On 54<sup>th</sup> and Lexington.  
Uber picks them up. You're done.  
Downtown Wall Street, uptown Harl  
Emulate a New York snarl!

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE DISABLED ON A WALK AROUND THE NABE

Beware the eastwest, northsouth slope on 92<sup>nd</sup> Street.

*(you and your cane'll be dancing the merengue on Mt. Everest.)*

Oh, yeah: there's the bump on the sidewalk in front of 223...

and that beery guy in 206?

Usually his caged Doberman barks loud;

they both show teeth.

Try to ignore them.

Looking down on the macadam, you gotta

avoid those early-spring deep potholes

on Amsterdam Avenue,

and Broadway,

and West End Avenue,

and 91<sup>st</sup> Street,

and Columbus.

The light changes pretty fast on Amsterdam;

rash rush-hour cars will gun forward in hotheaded pursuit of nothing.

Begin your crossing when the countdown is at 29

or you won't make the 60 feet to the other side.

There's construction outside the shoe repair so you hafta navigate into the street,

*(at least nobody's parked there)*

and the temporary walk space is made of plywood, so it's uneven.

Don't let your cane get stuck in the Broadway mall subway grating.

Don't stand off the curb because the 104 swerves in

close to the bus stop right beyond the crosswalk.

And by the way,

don't wear unsafe shoes

or carry too many bags home.

Breathe before you go.

## HITCHCOCK'S REAR WINDOW: EYE AND EAR

Like Jimmy Stewart's,  
my window faces the rear.  
Unlike Jimmy Stewart,  
My elbows rest  
                                New York-style  
on a pillow on the sill.

3 P.M.:  
the eye discerns  
no crimes  
in broad daylight,  
along a sliver of Amsterdam Avenue,  
here in New York City,  
on the Upper West Side.

Out my rear view,  
black blank rectangles,  
canvases  
in the black-box stacks:  
gentrified horrors  
or diverse pleasures  
develop like Poe's or Cartland's  
along this sliver of Amsterdam Avenue,  
here in New York City,  
on the Uppity West Side.

Like Jimmy Stewart's,  
my window's  
a still-life proscenium with one set.  
Unlike Jimmy Stewart's,  
my cast's an ever-changing living tableau  
revealing  
shopping-carted thrift-shop bluehairs

and handholding muklucked hula dancers.

3 A.M.:

No longer am I at the sill.

Stage curtains drawn,

my window reveals

no vision of crime.

Police sirens, crashes, fire trucks...

the proscenium,

darkened,

allows only for

theater of the ear.

**PRAIA, IN SUCUPIRA,**

**THE AFRICAN MARKET, ON FRIDAY MORNING**

Cabo Verde, 2016

Hot and cobblestoned, busy and boisterous,  
make me no never mind about where this path leads or that one follows.

"Lady, come here!"

"No, come HERE! See what I have for you, see what is perfect for you see  
what will fit you."

"Speak English?"

"Français? Portugues?"

"Español."

Smile: " similar."

A woven turquoise bag, a green bottle, coffee of Cabo Verde, salt, fishfishfish,  
tee shirts marked with odd brand names, like Ralph Luaren and NIKY and sneakers  
and high heeled shoesshoesshoes, jeans with odd brand names like RINK and  
LEVIES and African dresses hanging on old wire hangers next to African fabric  
handbags and wallets and shopping bags and carved wooden statues and carved  
wooden fruit and paintings in pastel watercolors and vibrating oils and women at  
their sewing machines stitching stitching and women braiding extensions on bowed  
heads while customers smoothed out the long dark and sometimes red or gold  
tresses and pedicures in the walkways and fabric folded neatly in untouchable piles  
and healing herbs in neat plastic bags and black luggage and socks and boxes of  
Sazón Goya next to shampoo and hair straighteners and overstuffed brown and gold  
sofas and plastic-wrapped double mattresses and pressed-wood bureaus with mirrors  
and red velveteen chairs and Chupa Chups lollipops in glass jars and striped plastic  
sandals and pink and pale green underpants and necklaces of bright gold and  
multicolored stones and pale nut cookies in plastic wrap and yellow boxes of Barilla  
pasta and cleaned auto parts and orange leatherette cellphone cases and charms to  
dangle from the cellphones trying not to go home with the seller another night...oh  
please buy me buy me buy ME.

I did.



**BAL'MOR,  
OR MAYBE THE REGULAR U.S. OF A.,  
DOIN' LIKE WE ALWAYS DID**

***I. Over a haircut in Jake's barbershop***

Even off a big-ass 55-inch teevee screen  
you gotta scrinch your eyes  
the way they show our kids  
rushing around  
like squeezed-tight ants at a picnic,  
like our kids don't deserve no respect.  
Thugs, they call them. Thugs.  
They ain't thugs;  
they just sick and tired of being sick and tired.

We didn't teach them to act like that.

(we were never like that)

"Yes sir" and "no, ma'am," they say: they know how to act  
but they tired. They say that's it,  
tired of another kid getting shot by a police bullet.

(we were, too)

They even got pictures on their phones for proof;  
now it ain't just "he say she say"  
like back in the day.

Now the whole world can see  
our boys still getting kilt left and right.

(we were, too)

Police scared of them  
just like they was scared of us.  
Cops are like they gunning down Al Qaeda  
instead of American children.

Look at 'em:

They just kids who had enough:

bad schools, no jobs,  
and don't wanna be the next dead child.

Nobody on teevee asking any of them who they are  
Or why they're mad.

Make 'em look like one big hill a ants on that damn screen!

Hoodies or facecovers or baseball caps cocked:

running here

running there

running everywhere.

Like on the path full of boric acid

them crazed ants go circular;

nowhere out the circle to aim for

nowhere out the circle to let go the burden.

Teevee's wrong.

They ain't one big black horde:

just scorned children trying to try

(we were like that, too)

## **II. *Over tea on the terrace, in Southport, CT***

I've been watching my television, just bewildered.

I'm not saying

they are wrong, but

I really don't know why

those people must behave that way,

running around like wild animals...

well, that's the way their parents bring them up,

like loud thugs with their rap music and droopy pants...

they just have no respect for their betters, is what I say.

where *are* those parents, after all?

I mean, I'm not saying

that their lives shouldn't improve, but

they don't go to school, I've heard,

and those people don't even have jobs.

I mean, after all,

it's not our fault they can't better themselves.

We give them everything, don't we, and for what?

The first chance they get, they riot in the streets and loot in the stores.

Now I'm not saying

that perhaps the police are always correct,

but if you are doing the wrong thing,

what choice do the police have, after all?

I know, I know:

they took pictures on their cell phones,

but what does that prove?

The police were probably only beating up the violent ones,

protecting themselves. And us.

Those people should be a little grateful,

That's all I'm saying.

## THE BILINGUAL PARA

punch a time clock every morning at 7:58, no later,  
because otherwise I get docked.

There's a special room for us to put up our things,  
separate from the teachers' room.

"¿Como te va esta mañana?" "¿y tu hija, mejor?"

We share *besos* on the cheek, and *abrazos*, sometimes a homemade *dulce*.

It is the only place in the building where we can relax into the familiar  
before we put on our subservient masks of English.

The teachers are not bilingual,  
Not bicultural,  
Not bi-understanding,  
and we stand between them and the children they serve.

In room 131, I take my place at the back, not in front with the teacher.

I say good morning to her,  
placing my notebook and belongings on the window shelf.

I have no desk of my own.

She nods back at me.

I greet the children as they enter: "Yasenia, *hola*."

"Y Miguel, did you do your homework?"

He smiles proudly and nods.

"Manuel," she intones, like she is requesting an instruction book  
instead of saying a child's name.

"Tell him to open his book."

"To what page, Miss?"

"Haven't you been listening? Page 29!"

I don't talk back to her, no.

Instead I join forces with the children she does not address,

all of us up against the wall of cold built by the *gringa* in front of the room,  
all of us wondering why we are here, why she is here.

I eat lunch together with *mis amigas* in the para room, unwrapping our leftovers  
from last night's *arroz con pollo*, heating it up in the microwave  
while laughing and catching up.

We have a half-hour before cafeteria duty, instead of the teachers.

They negotiated this in their contract, without our representation.

They think we are *estupidas*, because we are bilingual and live in  
apartments *en la comunidad*.

We don't have their degrees, their cars, their husbands or house in the suburbs,  
and every afternoon

with their Coach bags and well-cut hair, they drive away at 3 pm on the dot,  
afraid to get too Latina if they stay longer,

or maybe they think we will mug them for their little earrings.

We punch out at 3:17, no earlier, because we will be docked for minutes early.

## **A WOMAN ON THE ROAD**

She walks the musky dusty road in the bright dry sunshine, without a guard or mascot or companion. Few other travelers are on this treeless road; she is alone with her thoughts and herself. No cars, no trucks, no other walkers: blissful silence. There is pleasant peace on this road.

Some days this long dirt road takes her nowhere in particular. Today, however, this long dirt road takes her to town, to the marketplace, where other women and some men are selling food and lovely charms. She is confidently blissful in this moment.

Draped as she is in flowing robes, cargo pants unseen, her confident frame is hidden from anyone's view. Her confident face is open and uncovered to the yellow sun, and her dark wavy hair flows free. The sun feels good to her; the air feels good to her.

She is thinking about the roadside flowers and the beautiful spring day. She is thinking that she will go to the market and buy something wonderful for dinner: maybe a small steak and a ripe tomato. She is thinking she will pick from her garden some green peas for her meal and some flowers for her table.

She is humming a tuneless tune, shining the sun in her face and waving her hair free. There is pleasant peace in her heart, and the sun feels good to her arms and her sandaled feet and her face.

Two darkdots come toward her on the horizon. They rush in her direction. The darkdots enlarge; they come from the entrance to the town, from the marketplace. They become forms; the forms become men. The men become menacing, yelling, waving some long things in the air. The men come closer to her, now 50 meters away, and her hands retreat into her cargo pants, under the flowing robes.

The men see that she is a woman, her face open and uncovered to the sun. The men now 30 meters away have entered her bubble of pleasant peace. They begin to scream at her, call her heretic and whore and filth. They will teach her a

lesson, they yell, not to disrespect them by her openness, her confidence, her flowing free hair.

The men are 15 meters from her. They are raving, yowling at her. They will harm her to teach her this lesson; they will show her what happens to women who dare to disobey the rules that are set into place by men for the freedom of men.

When they are five meters away, she withdraws one hand from her cargo pants pocket, and in it she has a small dark thing. She neither slows down nor speeds up; she continues her pace and the tuneless tune. She aims for one and hits her mark, and then she aims at the second and hits her mark again. With her other hand, she drops a yellow paper wrapped around a red stone very near the feet of the two stunned men.

The two stunned men who were once darkdots see ever-growing red dots forming in the crotch of their pants. They grab for the ever-growing red dots, now yowling for another whole reason: the pain of being shot in one ball by a markswoman whose aim is steady and true.

She neither slows down nor speeds up. She does not look back to attend their pain. She hums her tuneless tune, a confident small smile growing on her face. *Two down*, she thinks. They will understand when they pick up the yellow paper wrapped around the red rock.

The paper explains: *Hello. We tried explanation, and it didn't work. We tried understanding, and it didn't work. So now we are speaking your violent language, we worldwide revenge women. Each of us is a trained markswoman. We will shoot you in one ball, so you know pain but not death. Your kind of men will have to be very careful to whom you shriek and yowl and yell: you can never tell which activist in the entire world will shoot the next of you for entering into the pleasant peace of a woman. Learn to have a delightful day.*

She continues to hum her tuneless tune, shining the yellow sun in her face and waving her hair free. There is pleasant peace in her heart, and the sun feels good to her arms and her sandaled feet and her face.

She is thinking about the roadside flowers and the beautiful spring day. She is thinking that she will go to the market and buy something wonderful for dinner: maybe a small steak and a ripe tomato. She is thinking she will pick from her garden some green peas for her meal and some flowers for her table.

Some days this long dirt road takes her nowhere in particular. Today, however, this long dirt road takes her to town, to the marketplace, where other women and some men are selling food and lovely charms. She is confidently blissful in this moment.



## **THE POSE IN GERMANY**

The first time I saw the pose was in a German cemetery in 2008. Luk, my Belgian companion, had taken me on a tour of the World War I cemeteries on the North Sea coast of Belgium and France, where I saw that virtually an entire generation of Western European and American men had been murdered in battles. By the time we had toured the third one, I was literally screaming in horror of man's inhumanity.

He also showed me the tiny cemetery of German men who had been interred there, too, on this serene north coast of France. It was silent, that one, and shady. There were no visitors remarking or walking through, no mourners searching for their same names or relatives.

Although it was well-kept, it did not have the majesty of the other, larger cemeteries of men on "our" side. Those cemeteries are sunlit and have standing tombstones with religious markers, wooden white crosses and Stars of David.

These in the German cemetery, however, were in-ground stones, flat, dark grey. I think I remember names on the markers. But I was less aware of that detail than of the statue.

At the back of this also-hallowed ground, there was a huge monument carved by Kathe Köllwitz from lighter grey stone, or maybe it was poured from cement and concrete. The detail is vague yet the memory is clear, somehow. The two relatively abstract figures, a man and a woman, were kneeling, heads bowed, in what the artist showed as absolute sorrow and penance. You can tell they are eternally sobbing, praying. But it is how they are kneeling, in a position of such obsequiousness, such subservience, and to arise from this posture would have required crawling in order to stand.

Luk had let me wander through alone; I think he understood the depth of emotion this brought: to be with another person would not have let me feel what I

had to feel. These graves were those of the enemy, those who would have killed more soldiers on "our" side.

But these were also dead young men. These also were people murdered in battle. These men were somehow not allowed to go home to be interred, asleep forever as enemies on alien soil.

The monument of the kneeling couple, however, stays strong in my visual memory. Their grief and penance are strong. And their utter misery, and their desire for forgiveness, their abject humility. Not only were they mourning for these young men, unable to be at home, they were subjects of pity and scorn, and they knew it. They took in their roles.

I saw the posture again in Trier, the oldest city in Germany. Walking through the Porta Nigra to the city center, I encountered that same posture, not once, but twice: first a woman, then a man.

Never in my travels had I seen beggars like this. In New York City, beggars will entertain with clever repartee or performance. They will make announcements in subway cars about their lives. They almost always try to reassure fellow passengers that they have no desire to harm. Of course, there are also beggars sitting against walls on pavement, but somehow in my callousness, they become part of the landscape.

In Frankfurt, there were also beggars. They were white men with dirty hands, reaching their open palms toward your face, saying unknown things in German. Never particularly threatening, they withdrew their hands when I said I speak no German, although invariably they had some words in English. I had left their space, turning my head or walking away by then.

I came to Trier at Luk's suggestion. We have a complicated relationship, but I trust him 100% when it comes to travel: there is no place I go that he has no

experience with. He said I would like Trier, and I should go there before coming home to Belgium.

Of the memorable things in Trier, the huge Roman wall and these two people stand out. The Roman wall, the Porta Nigra, still stands 2300 years after it was built. You walk through its darkened arches to get to the pedestrian shopping area, where people go about their business of living.

I had to go to the post office to send out a heavy package when I saw her. She was in the process of arranging her body on the street in front of a rather expensive shop of women's clothes and accessories. I couldn't really tell her age, but I could tell she was worn. Her clothes were old and rumpled, her dark blue jacket open because the zipper was broken. She did not put down a paper nor a mat nor cloth; she sat directly on the cold sidewalk.

She was careful to sit just so; with her hands, she arranged her legs underneath her, placing her feet with the inner arches down in the pavement, her calves flat against the street and her thighs tightly together. Her back was a little bent over, and she had placed her hat on the ground before her. She looked at me in the eyes as I passed her, something no other beggar had ever done before to me. New York beggars assiduously avoid eye contact; it is an unwritten rule.

I passed her by, did what I had to do at the post office. I crossed the street to the Sparkasse, which is where I could change my 200 Swiss francs to 158 euros. Stopping in the 1-euro shop, because I am, after all, a budget-conscious shopper, I saw that she was still there, in her posture of abjection.

She stuck in my mind. Why had I not given her some token? What was one euro to me, and how would it be different to her? As I returned to my hotel to get my iPad for picture taking, I determined that if she were still there, I would give her some change.

Well, of course she was, and I dropped a euro into her hat. She smiled at me and wished me *gutte morgen*.

There is a lot to see and shop for in Trier. Roman ruins and cathedrals and churches and winding small streets and M&S and H&M and bread shops and sandwich places. People eat in the street here: sandwiches and cakes and fruit and drinks and even Chinese food from the carton. It was Heilig Rock Schüle Day, and there were hundreds of students from that school all around, as well as older kids with their teachers earnestly trying to tell them some history, but those adolescents were paying attention more to the spring weather and each other, posing adorably in front of a gold-leafed statue in the square. I recognized them: they were the students from every single high school in the western world.

On the side of another brick-paved walking street, he was kneeling in the same posture as she had been, although his cupped hands held his dirty cap upside-down in supplication. He looked at no one, just straight ahead into some distance only he could see. His legs were tucked in the identical way hers had been, and in the same way the couple in the statuary in that cemetery. There was no pride or hope in him; just his cap with a few small coins in it. Begging. In this comfortable town, in this quite comfortable country, with people living comfortable lives and shopping in lots of stores, these two people embodied the concept of nothing and nothingness.

The man looked far more abject and older than she did; somehow from him I could create a story of a sorrowful wife and two little children around an old small wooden table with a bare light bulb hanging over it and no food and no ability to be a breadwinner. He had created a more complete tableau. That he was the wrong age for toddlers and infants was irrelevant.

At first, I passed him by, too.

I did some shopping. I bought a sandwich to eat as I walked, and a few scarves for gifts. I bought a small book about Trier in case anyone had questions to ask. I was getting tired by now, and had walked through all the squares and marketplaces, and I needed to sit down with a coffee and perhaps a sweet.

He was still kneeling, still forlorn, on the bare pavement as I approached. From a distance of a meter or so, I rummaged through my bag for my change purse to give him a euro, too. As I dropped the coin into his cap, he acknowledged my generosity with a nod and some muttered words.

"Guten tag," I said and hurried past. It seemed embarrassing enough to be in both our positions; I wanted no more of this, this posture of misery that seemed to be indigenous to this culture, between the statues and the woman and the man.

On my way back to the Porta Nigra, I saw that the beggar woman had moved across the street to outside of a big department store. There did not seem too many people scurrying around that corner, but she had begun to arrange herself again on the pavement. I hoped she'd remember that I had given her a euro; I did not want to give her more.

We smiled at each other and I walked on to the ice cream bistro, glad to have a place to finally sit down.

## CROSSING PATHS

In Europa Life, a small hotel near the Frankfurt train station, people obviously came from all over the globe, revealed by multilingual signage to the brochures and pamphlets in a wide variety of languages. Most of my fellow travelers were, like me, on a budget. Not barebones, but modest accommodations with as much bang for the buck as possible. This hotel, with positive reviews on *tripadvisor.com*, was modern and clean with free Wi-Fi, free breakfast, free minibar (including beer!), and the Baselerstrasse tram stop was right in front. In addition, although other travelers on the Internet had warned that around the train station was the red-light district, it was not evident. This was a street with big office buildings. According to my research, in an unusual situation for inexpensive German hotels, my fourth-floor single room was furnished with a full bed and complimentary toiletries.

I'd only visited Germany a few times before, and they were acts of defiant courage. Born to an observant but not Orthodox Jewish family at the end of a World War II, I grew up in a kosher home, went to Hebrew school between the ages of eight and seventeen, and learned about the horrors of anti-Semitism, although not firsthand. We lived in a New Jersey suburb where a large percentage of residents were upper middle-class Jews, like us, and so we were somewhat shielded. No one ever painted swastikas on our doors or garages; no one called me "kike" or any other slur. But I heard about such behaviors and attitudes, certainly, from history books and stories from older family members.

Among the lessons I was taught was that Germany was not a destination for Jews. Germans were to be feared, avoided, lest "something" happen to me. That "something" was never stated outright, but the history books gave me the lore, the ugly facts: all Jews were victims of Nazis; all Germans were Nazis. Otherwise, how could the Holocaust have happened?

And it was assumed that a single generation would not eradicate prejudice against Jews, just like here in America generations have not eradicated racism or other group prejudices. It would simmer beneath the governmental surface until it exploded against me, against us. My grandparents, after all, had escaped pogroms in Russia; even though my father had served in the U.S. Army, it had been in the South Pacific. My parents had observed the Holocaust from the safety of America, but they knew the dangers. We knew survivors who had tattoos on their forearms. And yet, I was curious.

I had been to Germany twice before, the first time in 2004, with Luk, my non-Jewish Belgian beau, for an afternoon to visit Aachen, where Charlemagne had been coronated. He was eager to show me important sites within driving distance from his home in eastern Flanders. Luk did not know of my fears of going to Germany, and I didn't feel like I could tell him. After all, he had been brought to Germany as an infant to live in a displaced persons' camp where his father was teaching other Flemish people at the end of the war. Luk said that after Flemish, his next language was German, that he had learned it from his 14-year-old nanny who had taken care of him and his sister. He had explained that her family had had nothing; that they would have starved to death if it had not been for the little money and the food she brought home to her family each day. I had never considered the plight of the average German citizen after World War II, when Germany was impoverished and shamed before the world.

I remember being a little apprehensive as I waited alone for him in the plaza while he parked the car. Suppose someone could "tell?" I would be able to sense the bias in the air, I thought: Jew-hating would be obvious. But nothing had happened. No one could "tell," and I was safe. In Germany. My beliefs began to transform, although a part of me chalked it up to the way I look, that I blend in with non-Jews. I don't fit the physical stereotype.

And then, in 2007, after this trip to Aachen, with the express consternation of my parents, I had visited Karlsruhe, where my beloved grandfather, Max Kupperman, was born. Ever since his sister, my Great-aunt Lil, had told me of their birthplace, I had wanted to visit, to pay homage. For 30-odd years, I wanted to see where they had come from. Jews were once welcome in Germany as citizens. Surely there were still shards of positive evidence of our existence.

"Why do you want to go there? There is nothing for us in Germany but prejudice and anti-Semitism," my father argued.

"Because we have as much right there as anybody, and besides your father was born there," I responded, but he shook his head, muttering about his ignorant, stubborn daughter, how I would "never learn."

I arranged to spend five days in Karlsruhe while I was on my annual trip to Belgium. After all, the train travel only took a few hours; I could stay in a modest hotel, and I could do some research about my family. I wrote to the local Chabad rabbi to find out if there was any information available about Jewish families in that city. He wrote back saying he had no information, but he put me in touch with a guy who was writing the history of Jews in Karlsruhe. I emailed the guy to explain what I wanted, but I never received a response.

When I disembarked from the train, I realized that I was the first person in our family to be there in over 100 years, when my grandfather and his sister were taken to New York by their mother in 1891. I walked around the small city, surprised to see memorials and plaques to fallen Jews and other victims of the National Socialists. There was a designated walking trail of notable Jewish sites before Kristallnacht, the infamous Night of Broken Glass in 1938 when Germans went on a rampage against the Jewish population across this huge country.

This was before the common proliferation of tablets and iPhones, so the next morning I ducked into an Internet café, grabbed a cup of coffee and started to read



my emails. When I checked the spam folder, there was a long letter from Herr Berger, the man I had written to at the suggestion of the Chabad rabbi. He gave me detailed information about my grandfather, his siblings, his parents and grandparents, with an apology that he would be out of town when I was there. I printed out the email and reread it more carefully back in the hotel.

One of the things I was in search of was my great-grandmother's whereabouts. My father had known his grandfather, but he had no stories of his grandmother. No one had ever talked of her; my father did not even know that she had been in the United States. I wondered if she had remained in Karlsruhe.

People were helpful to me when I told them why I was in this small city, which they kept comparing to Pittsburgh. I can say "please" and "thank you" and "Sorry, I don't speak \_\_\_\_" in whatever language of the country I am in, but in my experience, Europeans pride themselves on being able to speak some English. Shopkeepers would find me translators into English, helping me locate the Jewish cemetery and the footprint of the ancient synagogue no longer standing, finding the house where my great-grandparents had lived when they got married and the house where my grandpa was born, which had been across the street from the Internet cafe.

When I went to the Hall of Records with the information about my grandfather, the first person I met told me, mostly in sign language, to wait in this outer office for Frau Ehler, who was the only one in the Registry of Records who spoke English. After I presented her with the meager details of my grandfather's birth, she told me that it would cost eight euros for each notarized copy of the document she would find. I told her it was all right; I had come a long way for this, and I started tear up. She gave me a strange look and disappeared into her office.

Upon her return, she was holding an old book that contained the page of my grandfather's birth certificate. Then she brought me into her office to show me my

Great-aunt Lil's birth certificate and my great-grandparents' wedding registry, with the signature of my great-grandfather. After she made copies of each and had them notarized by her boss, we struggled to translate some of the words, which were in Old German. As she turned to leave, I said, "Wait! I need to pay you 40 euros!"

"Oh no," she replied, "this is a gift."

I didn't find my great-grandmother's grave in the Jewish cemetery, and I couldn't enter the Orthodox one. (I know now that she was in the United States, since I have the New York birth certificate of her youngest daughter, dated 1900. But I cannot find any death records.) But I dug a hole near a grave with a last name the same as her birth name and buried some items from her family in the United States: her son's thimble, a shell from her great-grandson's beach house, a stone from my country house, and a paper with all her descendants' names. By then, I was so overwhelmed, I had to leave a day early to return to the safe comforts of Belgium.

That Karlsruhe trip had given nuance to what I had thought about the German character. As a left-leaning social liberal, I was there at the time of Bush 43, and although I had signed petitions and made phone calls and emailed against his doctrines and acts, I usually felt like nothing I did was enough, or even worthwhile. But in Karlsruhe, I saw evidence of the acts of defiance some non-Jews risked; I began to grasp the perceived helplessness of us average citizens. Perhaps, like other citizens living under fearsome governments, most had been afraid to invoke their extraordinary bravery. Most had been unable to wage big battles against the minions of the Fuhrer, but they could show small acts of courage to help their fellow citizens and neighbors. The crack widened of my comprehension of universal human nature, I thought.

So here I was in 2012, on my third trip into Germany, this time to visit a friend for a week. And this time, I would be there as a guest in a home.

Ulrike and I had met when she stayed with me in New York as a Hospitality Club guest. Hospitality Club is a free Internet service that pairs people from different countries, and she had written to me to ask about staying with me in my apartment when she visited New York. I'd never really met a German Christian before; I was curious and not a little bit nervous. After all, old beliefs die hard. What would she do when she found out I am a Jew, especially one with heritage in Germany? And what would my parents think?

She came over to my apartment for an initial interview to see if we were a good fit. We spent four hours that first day, chatting and laughing and discovering each other's habits. She returned to Germany to plan for her stay, and when she came back to New York City, Ulrike moved in with me.

In her, I discovered a different kind of German from what I had heard about: a liberal, warm risk taker whose uncle had hidden Jews under the church where he had been a priest. She showed me a copy of the newspaper article that told of how he had been discovered and almost killed by Nazi soldiers when Americans liberated him. Ulrike is an impassioned artist and writer, a single mother of adult daughters who lives her life the same way I do, not worrying so much about what people think of her life choices. My parents liked her; everyone liked her. A year after she stayed with me for four months, I agreed to visit her.

Frankfurt was a three-day stop before my week visiting Ulrike in Freiburg. Ulrike and her friend Daniela had surprised me by picking me up at the airport. They had wanted to show me some of Frankfurt in the car, but I was exhausted and kept falling asleep. In the hotel, I slept for hours, and at about 9:00 p.m., I awoke, hungry.

I dressed for the cool spring evening and went to the elevator, planning to walk to the train station for a late light dinner. I had heard it was an architecturally interesting station with shops and restaurants. Only a couple of blocks away, it

seemed better than trying to wander through Frankfurt alone late on a Friday night. There was no evening restaurant in our hotel.

The woman came out of her room at the same time as I did. She had a crutch under her left arm, and she was dressed all in black, as I often am. But she was in a full burqa, with a niqab, and only her eyes were uncovered.

I could tell she smiled at me, and she touched my arm in warmth. We both acknowledged our walking assists: my cane and her crutch. She greeted me in halting German; I said semi-apologetically, "Sorry, English."

"Ah," she said and pointed to herself, "Arabia."

I pointed to myself and said, "New York City."

Normally one makes polite conversation in an elevator. We could have commiserated briefly about our walking assists, talked about why each of us was here in Frankfurt, the weather. But I was silent.

In my head, I had so many questions for this woman: did you have an accident? Did you have an operation? Why are you so covered up? Are you comfortable? Can you go out by yourself? Is each rule different for different Muslim women in different places? Are women who cover only their hair somehow less...something...than you? But I remained silent.

Her mobile phone rang and she answered it, hanging up after a second or two. There was a photo on her screen of a person, but I couldn't see who it was.

In the reception, she was met by another woman in burqa and niqab and a man in regular western clothes. We waved goodbye as I left. She had been so friendly, not somehow aloof and removed, as her clothing had suggested to me.

I thought about my clothes and everything I'd heard about the reasons for hijab. I was certainly dressed relatively modestly in a long skirt, scarf around my neck and warm short jacket. I was not showing any inordinate amount of skin. Just my head was uncovered, and I remembered a man who had screamed at me, "Cover

your head!" in Jerusalem on my first trip in 1974. I didn't comprehend then, and, truthfully, I don't now, either.

And yet, she had not allowed our clothing differences to interfere with friendliness.

Encountering her brought so many questions to my mind, like about arousing men with our bodies. What was the arousal factor? If all people look so different from each other, wouldn't it be true that some women would be attractive to some men and others would be virtually invisible to them? Doesn't such coverage arouse their curiosity even more? After all, what you don't see is often more tantalizing than what you do.

If they could be so easily aroused, why are there no rules for THEIR control? Why are their wrists not shackled when they go out and their eyes covered with blinders like horses? Why do they not go out only with their mothers or grandmothers to make sure they behave? Why don't they have regulations governing their behavior with strict bans and punishments if they disobey? And why don't they have dress codes to follow? If they appeared in public without their shackles, they could be stoned in the public square by women who are the judges of public moral behavior. If they were to look at women the wrong way, they could have their eyes put out. If they were to give in to their illicit, irreverent, anti-Qur'anic passions, they could be put to death.

Although there were lots of people at breakfast the next morning, neither she nor her companions were there. I was hoping to spend some time over tea or coffee with her, but although I dawdled, she never appeared. A part of me felt disappointed; a part relieved. So many questions I had, and I wondered if she did, too. I wondered how she ate or drank if her mouth was covered.

All around sunny Frankfurt on Saturday, I saw Muslim women in various forms of Islamic dress. At a big street market selling local food and wine, there were

young girls in tight pants and form-fitting shirts with headscarves, and a lot of middle-aged women in burqas with their faces showing, shopping with their husbands and children, most of whom were casually dressed. The burqas were solid colored and not brightly toned, but there was a certain element of fashion, some with lace or metallic trim. Often, their headscarves were in lovely contrast with their dresses. Not any others, though, in such coverage as the woman on the elevator and her companion in the hotel reception. All I noticed with the men was facial hair: they didn't seem to shave their beards, although most did not seem to have mustaches. Some wore head coverings that looked like yarmulkes, the skullcaps that Orthodox Jewish men wear.

She wasn't at breakfast on Sunday morning, either. Maybe she had checked out of the hotel. By now, I was curious and emboldened to speak with her. I could be friendly, too.

On Easter Sunday was the Dippemess, an annual fair in the outskirts of Frankfurt with rides and food and crowds. In the early afternoon, I took the tram to the fair, noting the difference between the public transportation system of this city and New York. More traditionally garbed Muslim women here in Frankfurt, I observed, than I see in Manhattan. I really only know one Muslim woman who wears modest Islamic clothing, a woman I used to work with. We got along well, but I never asked her the intimate questions that kept arising in my head now.

Most of the women in Islamic dress did not look uncomfortable; they seemed happy to be out with their families. I don't think I saw any walking alone, as I was. They were eating ice cream or pretzels or drinking juice, much like others. Some food stalls had "halal" signs to indicate they were compliant with Islamic dietary law. But I didn't see any "kosher" signs, nor any religious Jewish families at the Dippemess. I wondered why. Were there not enough Jews in Frankfurt to warrant "kosher" food signs in a big fair? Or maybe the Dippemess was during Passover,

when observant Jews would not eat non-Passover food all week, regardless of whether kosher or not. No longer observant myself, I had lost touch with the calendar.

In some ways, hijab allows for mutual recognition, like nuns in habits. A nun in a habit can always identify with another nun in a habit; they can usually even tell which order the other belongs to by the color and cut of their clothing. Orthodox Jewish men who wear different Hasidic clothing can also tell their origins: Ger, Belze, Bobover, Lubovitch, Satmar, others. They can recognize where they come from by the style of their hats and the kind of coats and pants the men wear. For some, like me, blending in is imperative; for others, like them, distinction from the general population is paramount. I wondered about the differences in Islamic women's clothing: could they also identify their origins from their style.

The Dippemess was clearly a trendy destination, and the food was sensational. In one stall called the Happy American Ice Cream Shop, the servers never smiled. I tasted potato pancakes unlike those I had grown up with, and apple wine that I didn't like, and lots of sausages and other grilled meats. There was one popular stall where an entire cow had been what we would call barbecued, the server slicing off portions from the skeleton and putting them on bread for the customers. There were elaborately decorated carousels and water games. I noticed a lot of references to the United States and to New York on souvenirs, like tee shirts and travel bags. I took pictures with my cellphone, although not of the Muslim women and men. I didn't know how to ask.

Coming back on the tram from Dippemess, I stopped at the train station first to get some money from the Geldautomaat-- the ATM. The night was clear; my walk was undisturbed and peaceful. I had had a wonderful day in lovely weather, and I was almost ready to go to sleep.

She was sitting outside the hotel at one of the small tables, the woman on the elevator. I raised my hand in greeting, but for a moment I was unsure. It could have been her companion. Maybe she was waiting for someone; she was alone. She had her phone in her hand, and she recognized me as I approached.

"Hallo!" she said. I greeted her back, relieved to know I was right about the person, even though I thought she was meant to be invisible.

Then she said something else, and showed me the picture on the phone. It was of a woman, her face and hair uncovered, and she had not-great skin. She was smiling for the camera.

"It is me," she said, pointing to herself. I looked at the photo, not knowing what to say. But I felt that she had revealed something important to me, although I am not sure what it was.

"Ah," I exclaimed and smiled. Then I went inside.

I have felt guilty ever since, having missed an opportunity for understanding across a divide.



## **GLOSSARY**

### **DUTCH**

*Mosselen met fritten*: mussels served with fries, a national Flemish dish

*Vlaamse*: Flemish; from northern Belgium

*Waterzooi*: Flemish stew made from chicken and vegetables with an egg added to the broth for thickening

### **IRISH**

*Praítaí*: potatoes

### **SPANISH**

*Ajies*: small sweet peppers, used for seasoning in Caribbean cooking.

*Arroz con gandules*: rice with pigeon peas, a party dish in Spanish-speaking Caribbean homes

*Arroz moro*: White rice prepared with squid ink and seasonings, eaten on special occasions in Spanish-speaking Caribbean homes

*Boricua*: Puerto Rican, named for the indigenous population of the island

*Chicharrón*: crispy skin and meat of chicken or pork, deep fried, available in Puerto Rican restaurants and food stalls

*Comida*: food, meal

*Gringa*: non-Latina; usually a white woman

*Habichuelas*: beans, usually red, served with rice in Caribbean meals

*Helado de coco*: coconut ice cream

*Maduros*: ripe plantains, sliced and fried

*Paseos*: evening strolls, mostly for socializing

*Pastelón*: a traditional Dominican dish layered with ground beef, plantains, cheese, and seasonings

*Pernil*: seasoned and roast pork shoulder, cooked till it is falling off the bone

*Primas*: cousins

*Quisqueyanas*: Dominican women; named for the indigenous people of the  
Dominican Republic

### **YIDDISH**

*Goyim*: Gentiles, non-Jews

*Kugel*: a baked noodle pudding with eggs, sour cream, and spices, either sweet or  
savory

*Lukshen*: egg noodles, either thick or thin, added to Jewish dishes like chicken  
soup or kugel

*Mandln*: puffy, crispy balls used to garnish chicken soup in Jewish cooking

*Treyfe*: not kosher, refers mainly to food

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