

**Terminal Six**

After exiting JFK, I hold my hand  
out the cab window  
and reach for the dark buildings.  
From the mirror, dice  
hang. The cabbie turns to my brother:  
*you look like a terrorist.*

I think: *you look like a terrorist*  
too. The cabbie drives with one hand.  
Turning to my brother,  
I catch his face in the window,  
spilling like dice.  
I reach for him in the dark as buildings

rear back. As kids, we reached for building  
blocks and did not look like terrorists  
when we knocked the towers down. A roll of the dice—  
our small hands  
might shake then the roofs and windows  
would crumple. On lucky days, my brother

finished a tower, tall as he was. My brother  
tears down and rebuilds  
singing, "And their shoes were like windows,  
and their shoes were like bone." We terrorized  
our cities, hand-  
built from red blocks like diced

cubes of meat, but nobody died.  
Nobody lived there but my brother  
and me. It only looked a little like Manhattan.  
Tonight, my brother faces the buildings.  
The cabbie turns onto the highway, terrified  
of the rain on the windows

and the rain on the roof as I wind  
my watch back like a bomb. The dice  
clack against each other like terrorists  
tapping out codes. Looking out, my brother

uses his fingers to measure buildings.  
The cabbie swings one arm, the hand

of a speeding clock. The buildings on our street reach for my hand.  
The cabbie turns in the terrible dark then turns on my brother.  
My brother's eyes are dice in the reflection in the window.

## **An Irish Woman Travels to England**

I cross the Irish Sea imagining  
the curve of your chin and your eyes opening,  
adjusting to light. The world is initially  
strange. Above the clouds, the atmosphere  
thins. Darling, you've mastered mimicry.  
You practice the art of breathing, swallowing  
the yellowish liquid that cradles you, sampling  
what feeds you, nutrient-rich. You imitate  
the rise and fall of my lungs. It's difficult  
to talk to you now. In the hospital  
I will not sing. No more lullabies  
until I feel the anesthesia—  
it arrives like a circus at night, stealthily  
setting up tents and unlatching the animals  
who claw at their costumes and howl as you  
hang upside down on the red trapeze.

**On Our Last Night in Lancaster, Pennsylvania,**

I touch your knee. We leave the bar early,  
but as we walk, you realize your card  
is gone. We loop back—

the construction paused  
on the street, the closed Amish bakery  
where the woman who opened the oven  
wore a white bonnet, stiff as a dead dove,  
where we ate pastries. We watch a car drive  
past a horse-drawn carriage. It moves over  
into the opposite lane, a wide berth  
since horses on the road spook easily.  
Each driver looks up from his century  
toward the other—

At the bar, you hurry  
inside while I wait by the door. I shoot  
you a loving glance. It's still not too late.

**When We Meet,**

I am doing a handstand. Launching green  
catapults, I lunge with my head bent down  
then fling my legs. You take off your glasses,  
laying them down next to mine in the grass.

You stretch your shoulders then ask if my name  
is spelled like Kafka's lover's. *Yes it is.*

My mother studied Kafka while pregnant:  
talking to the typewriter & my heartbeat  
sliding the carriage as she finishes  
a line, searching for syllables to shape

a daughter. We balance at the tipping  
point where our names might revert to verbs.  
If we can hold still for just a little  
longer, the letters will descend like birds.

( )

*for Michael Longley*

Michael will indicate the parentheses  
in the air as he reads aloud:  
his hand cradles the space  
like the mother of the boy-soldier  
who cradles her child's cheek.  
He is everywhere.  
He is face up on the battlefield,  
watching the birds.  
Michael begins reading.  
He closes the parentheses  
then opens them.

## A Veteran of Hallucinations

*For Frank Ormsby*

Thanks to the Parkinson's medications,  
    he is a self-proclaimed veteran of hallucinations.  
The man beside him on the bus  
    eats fish and chips and Frank steals a bite.  
At home, Frank chats with the woman in the rocking chair  
    and calls her by his mother-in-law's name.

When my grandmother developed the tremor, she stopped  
    wearing rings  
then cardigans.  
    Frank cracks a joke and we laugh  
as he searches for the next page.  
    His unclipped fingernails  
glint in the stage lights.

## St. John's Relic

What they thought was his tongue turned out to be  
brain tissue congealed in blood, a saintly  
rediscovery that brought scientists  
to their knees. Jellied relic, I insisted  
we see it, and the reliquary  
was 'round the corner from that down-to-earth  
pub where you had just ordered beans on toast.  
It was our one honeymoon, hopefully,  
but that tongue to brain transubstantiation  
would not leave me. A good conversation  
starter with strangers while you ate the brine  
concoction, the brain-colored beans stinking  
your breath—you threw it straight into the bin.  
The rest for the rats. You're welcome, St. John.



## Nursery

*for Anthony Rampton, 1915 – 1993  
and my brother, 1992 –*

The man plays  
pat-a-cake  
with the baby.  
He lifts  
the envelopes  
of his hands.  
The baby opens  
his mouth  
to laugh.  
The stroke is a gutter  
broken in  
his mind.  
Somewhere between  
himself  
and the baby  
there is a well  
of words.  
The man turns  
the handle.  
The baby climbs  
into the pail.

## Guest

Afterwards, the ashes rise  
and rise until they float  
on the water.

The soul is the trick  
(a handkerchief turned inside-out)  
and its magician.

As we walk through Auschwitz in winter, our winter  
boots remind us we are  
somebody's children.

My pockets are empty—  
save the untasted crumbs,  
yellow stars gathering dust.

On the way home, I make myself  
peel the clementine  
you packed for me:  
one small good invention  
before the others.

The clementine was an accidental hybrid  
from an orphanage garden where  
the temporary children must have loved  
tossing it like a ball,  
sun in their hands.

## In Utero

### I. Amniocentesis

My sister calls me  
after the procedure.

I am at home  
with her children

who breathe through their lungs.  
The needle grows closer

like a stalactite  
dripping from inside

the roof of her belly.  
Your chromosomes

in crooked rows  
like gravestones.

### II. 2q37 Deletion

My niece is sitting in the bath  
when her eyes roll up.

Her brain sends static  
through her body

in ten second seizures  
as I wash

her back,  
her shoulder blades

like antennas  
receiving messages.

### III. Ultrasound

My niece holds her mother's stomach

like a crystal ball.

She speaks into her belly button  
telephoning you.

I stand behind the camera  
telling everyone to smile.

She asks her mama  
if the baby's bathwater

is warm enough—