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Spring 2019

## And come apart

Eric Marlin  
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AND COME APART

by

Eric Marlin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the  
Master of Fine Arts  
degree in Theatre Arts in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Art Borreca

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For Rhoda Marlin,  
and all the Jews who came before me

“The Jew is eternal. He is the embodiment of eternity.”

Leo Tolstoy  
What Is a Jew?

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And finally, thank you to Rhoda Marlin, whom this play is dedicated to and inspired by. Born Rhoda Strauss, she grew up on Wyona Street in Brooklyn, the daughter of two Jewish immigrants. She survived the twentieth century, and left behind a great legacy for her children and grandchildren. She passed away on November 25, 2016. Nanny, thank you.

## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

In *and come apart*, three adult daughters gather for their mother's passing. The audience is blindfolded for the play and experience the story from the mother's point of view – mute, blind, but able to hear. As we move further into the mother's final night, the daughters grapple with the last two thousand years of Jewish diaspora history. The women question what it means to have “crossed the Desert” and arrive in a “New Place” that demands that they strip away their cultural heritage. Ancient family wounds are reopened as the weight of assimilation bears down on the daughters.

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## PREFACE

In 2016, my grandmother died, and I realized I didn't know what it meant to be Jewish anymore. It was an identity that had shaped so much of my youth. It provided order, clarity, ritual, and purpose. But its pervasiveness had also turned it diffuse. While I knew I was Jewish, and I could point to certain traditions and cultural markers that signified Jewishness, I wasn't certain what it actually meant to be a Jew. If I didn't attend synagogue, how was I a Jew? If I felt no connection to Israel, how was I a Jew? If I didn't keep kosher, or speak Yiddish, or read Torah, how was I a Jew? Contemporary identity politics presumes that an identity is primarily an internal sense of self, and secondarily a social practice. So, to be gay (which I also am) is to engage in intersocial exchanges that constitute gayness, but also to be gay is something I know about myself divorced from these signs and signifiers. Sitting alone in a cabin on a mountain, I am still gay. Jewishness doesn't function that way for me. I only meaningfully feel like a Jew when engaging in certain Jewish practices. It is an ontological grey zone.

Meanwhile, my grandmother, Rhoda Marlin, had seemed so effortlessly Jewish. It flowed out of her. She didn't perform Jewishness. She didn't practice Jewishness. She simply was. I Alone in a cabin on a mountain, my grandmother remained a Jew. In New York or Los Angeles, in the twentieth or twenty-first century, single or widowed, she was a Jew. I envied that about her. I wasn't certain the same could be said about me. *and come apart*, which is loosely inspired by my experience of losing my grandmother, wrestles with these questions of Jewish identity.

What even is a Jew? There's no good answer to this question. It is an identity that is alternately defined in religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, and national terms. These overlapping, sometimes competing, categories have remained omnipresent throughout Jewish history, even as different periods have favored different categories. The Jews in the twelfth-century on the Iberian Peninsula favored cultural Jewishness, living as they did during the golden age of Hebrew poetry.

Elizabethans were obsessed with the racialized definition of Jews. And contemporary Zionism is founded on the idea of a national Jew. Also within Jewishness, there are multiple ethnic groups. My grandmother was an Ashkenazi Jew, the diaspora from Eastern Europe, and the largest Jewish community in the US. These are the Jews who gave us golems, Yiddish and latkes. But Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, to name the two other largest groups, have wildly different linguistic, culinary, cultural, religious and folkloric traditions.

Part of the issue is that as a white Jew, I exist both within the dominant culture, and as an existential threat to the dominant culture. I receive all the benefits of white privilege, but ask any white supremacist what they think of me, and it will not be good. In his book *Shakespeare and the Jews*, James Shapiro argues that contemporary anti-Semitism is very much the direct result of stereotypes formed in Elizabethan England. At the time, there were less than 2,000 Jews living in England, as this was centuries after the formal expulsion of the Jews. England's national identity was coming into fruition, and Jews provided a useful rhetorical framework for Otherness. Since there were not supposed to be any Jews in England, Jews must be fundamentally anti-English. The Jew was rendered, then, not just non-Christian, or an incomplete Christian, but the total opposite of a Christian.

In the United States, "Christian" is less the dominant framework than "white" (which has always been implicitly Christian, primarily Protestant). Here is the huge different between Elizabethan England and the United States. Assimilation became possible in America. Of course, this required us to go along with being a part of whiteness. Much smarter writers than myself have written on the formation of American whiteness. I am not saying something revolutionary by acknowledging that "white" is a social category that is malleable, historically contingent, and built on having Others to stand above and apart from. In her magnificent book *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter charts how American whiteness is a hodgepodge of racial definitions that are, in

many ways, incompatible. The reason whiteness remains so strong, though, is because it offers certain historically marginalized groups access to (oppressive) power structures.

In the current year, 2019, my family is white. This is not a historical inevitability. It is the end result of an assimilation that took place over multiple generations. Maybe this is what I saw in my grandmother that I longed for – someone who was not quite fully assimilated. I'm not saying that my grandmother wasn't white in our sociopolitical world. Rather, in her, I saw the potential for a different historical thread, one in which Ashkenazi Jewry did not get subsumed by Christian American whiteness.

Assimilation comes with a double vision. You have all the attendant privileges of the society you've assimilated into, but you also know that those privileges can be revoked at any moment. You must take responsibility for the privileges assimilation grants you, but be cautious, because you're still vulnerable. The 2018 shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh was a flashpoint, but not necessarily because Jews were being attacked. Jews know the history; we know being attacked is par for the course. But I think a portion of us, myself included, thought maybe, just maybe, we might finally be safe. Maybe America was where full integration was possible. We were wrong. Even as a part of the most protected class of American Jews, I felt defenseless.

My grandmother did not live to see this shooting. I'm sure she would've been heartbroken, but I doubt she would've been surprised. She knew who she was. She knew this was possible. I say that my grandmother felt more effortlessly Jewish. Does that just mean she felt more vulnerable? Is feeling internally Jewish simply about feeling permanently Othered? Isn't that letting the Elizabethans win? Is there a way for my identity as a Jew to exist outside of the Jewish-Christian binary? If the anti-Semitic image of the Jew is a rhetorical device for Christianity, what is the non-rhetorical Jew?

Part of the problem is the only robust alternative provided in the last two hundred years is Zionism, a political philosophy I oppose. Zionism has created a new binary – the Zionist Jew and the diaspora Jew. The Zionist Jew is strong, grounded, in tune with the long historical legacy of the Jewish people. The diaspora Jew is weak, unmoored, disconnected from the community. These archetypes stretch back to the nineteenth century Zionist writer Yosef Haim Brenner, who compared Jews in the diaspora to fleas. Brenner, along with other early Zionists, advocated for a complete negation of diaspora, for every Jew to return to Israel.

The Zionist Jew and the diaspora Jew are rhetorical devices disguised as archetypes. They imply a longstanding historical tension that can only be resolved by return to Israel. I find this preposterous. Jewish diaspora populations have concocted vibrant cultural traditions that are contingent on their geographical placement. Zionism flattens these distinctions in favor of nationalistic fervor.

I find something appealing about conceiving of myself as a diaspora Jew – unable to assimilate, but not longing for Israel. As one of the daughters in *and come apart* says, “i long for no homeland no final destination no ancient sites no pilgrimage just an untethering to be the stranger the wanderer the gravel in their shoe...” This position seems less about being an Other with a capital O, and more about being an outsider with a lowercase o. It is a position queers have long staked out. Because queers are forced to live outside of the dominant paradigm, we are better able to question social norms. This does not mean that queers accept abuse, or are fine with their rights being stripped away. They simply interrogate whether certain institutions are worth buying into. It is the reason why queer activists like Ryan Conrad and Yasmin Nair question gay marriage. Queerness is about not accepting normative values without inquiry. What if I thought of myself as a Jew in the same way I thought of myself as a queer?

This new affinity for diaspora Jewry, for finding a Jewishness that was equivalent to my queerness, all took shape after my grandmother's passing. I was searching for a new way to be Jewish in the world that wasn't about becoming religious or Zionist. It was this search that prompted the writing of *and come apart*, a play about a family grappling with their own Jewish identities, while contending with the violence of assimilation. Assimilation is so often presented as a positive, a sign of social progress. It means you've been "accepted." What is presented less often is how assimilation can also be a kind of flaying of your cultural identity, as you discard specificity for conformity. As you discard Yiddish for English. As you discard Jewishness for whiteness.

*and come apart* begins more or less as a family drama. Three adult daughters gather to mourn their dying mother. We do not see or hear from the mother. The focus is on the daughters, as they recollect, fight, and unpack old family histories. The play collapses two thousand years of Jewish diaspora history into this single generation of women. In the present, the daughters experience complete assimilation, but they remember a time before such assimilation even seemed feasible. As the play progresses, the form grows more abstract. Clear dialogues give way to shards of language. Demarcation between the daughters disintegrates. The women, unable to reconcile their previous marginalization with their current assimilation, begin enacting violence, both verbal and physical, on one another. The play is not a drama about their pain, but an attempt to create a pure expression of pain itself.

The three adult daughters in *and come apart* have different relationships to their assimilation, but all of them experience it fundamentally as a fracturing of the self. Personal identity grows slipperier in the play as they dig further and further into their family's history of trauma. This trauma is not only about violence perpetuated against Jews, but also the trauma of ultimately joining the society that once perpetuated said violence.

It is strange to be a part of this Christian world. I feel psychologically unprepared for it. Crosses frighten me. Every time I see one, I feel my body tense up. I feel the same way anytime I go into a church. Or encounter someone proselytizing in a subway station. But I'm not supposed to say anything because part of being assimilated means being comfortable with Christianity. It means saying as long as it's not the bad Christianity, I have no reason to be afraid. Because Judaism and Christianity are basically the same, right? We have more similarities than differences, don't we? I don't think that's true. *and come apart* is an unleashing of my own terrors. These women are still frightened of crosses, and are even more frightened of the prospect that their children might wear crosses.

One more thing about the play. There is a note at the beginning that says the audience should be blindfolded. It was a gimmick that came to hold the play's emotional core. I had long been interested in writing a play where the audience was blindfolded. I had no clue what this effect would be, but I was deeply curious. When I began writing *and come apart*, I realized the blindfolds would do more than change the audience's aural and visual experience. The blindfolds would transform the audience into the dying mother. The two times the play was performed here at Iowa, the blindfolds created an almost unbearable intimacy, having to hear the often-cruel language of the daughters. Multiple audience members noted as the play progressed, they began free associating memories of their own mother or grandmother. The play was not very empathetic narratively, but deeply empathetic in its visceral embodiment. The audience had to live in the discomfort of being this woman who was being dismissed by her children at the end of her life. Because they are the more traditional "main characters," the daughters are the ones we are most likely to empathize with. By inhabiting the role of the grandmother, the audience is able to empathize with her as well, even though she does not say a word.

The mother in this play is not quite the same woman as my grandmother. By the time she died, my grandmother had mostly forgotten the Yiddish she grew up with (she had actually started relearning it to reconnect with her roots). She had lived in goyishe neighborhoods as an adult. She was more assimilated than the mother in this play is. The mother in this play is completely pre-assimilation. I ask the audience in this play to really occupy the space the mother holds. Not just as the dying, but as the unassimilated, the intrinsically Jewish, the thing America fears. Let us all become what America fears.

## DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

*and come apart* was first presented in the Iowa Playwrights Workshop in Fall 2017. It received a reading as part of the 2018 Iowa New Play Festival on May 2, 2018. The reading was directed by Bries Vannon. Kierra Walker was the stage manager. The cast was as follows:

|   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| G | Holly Grum      |
| Y | Kai Swanson     |
| B | Alexis Healey   |
| P | Nicole Gabrione |

## CHARACTERS

- G           The eldest daughter. Late sixties.
- Y           The middle daughter. Early sixties.
- B           The youngest daughter. Mid fifties.
- P           The granddaughter. Ten years old.
- MOTHER   Unseen. Unheard. Ancient. Played by the audience.

The daughters should not all be the same race or ethnicity. Casting should reflect a diversity of peoples, including, but not limited to, gender identity, body types, and physical abilities. Blindfolds do not negate this requirement.

## **NOTES ON PERFORMANCE**

The audience should be blindfolded for the show. This is not negotiable. The play is meant to be experienced blindfolded. Exceptions may be made for deaf audience members. The blindfolds could be anything you like – sleeping masks, scarves, scraps of fabric, etc.

Even though the audience is blindfolded, the three daughters should perform the text live, in front of an audience that cannot see them. Their work should be staged in whatever way you think is appropriate. This is not a radio play. The granddaughter, however, could be a recorded voice.

## NOTES ON TEXT

(-) indicates a new character has begun speaking.

(/) cues the next actor's line.

(-) at the end of a line is an interruption.

(-) at the beginning of the line denotes it's a continuation of the character's previous line & thought.

(...) is an active silence.

Scene breaks denoted by dashes (- - - - -).

ALL CAPS does not necessarily indicate yelling.

Line breaks do not necessarily require a pause. They are a break in thought.

When a line is indented, it is a continuation of the line above it.

## YIDDISH & HEBREW TRANSLATIONS

**baruch hashem:** thank god

**nudnik:** pest

**got shikt di kelt noch di klaider:** god send the weather according to your needs

**ir paskudnyak:** you vile, evil person

**shteyner zol zi hobn nit kayn kinder:** she should have stones and not children

**trinkn zoln ir piavkes:** leeches should drink her dry

**eyn umglik iz far zi veynik:** one misfortune is too few for her

**zol zi krenken un gedenken:** let her suffer and remember

**feh:** dismissive term, equivalent to “ugh” or “whatever”

**amayn:** amen (different pronunciation)

Near the end of the play, the women recite *el maleh rachamim*, a prayer said at Jewish funerals. The prayer should be sung. There are different versions of the melody – any version is appropriate as long as it is one that would be used by a cantor or a rabbi. The prayer roughly translates as follows:

“God, full of mercy, who dwells above, give rest on the wings of the divine presence, amongst the holy, pure and glorious who shine like the sky, to the soul of this woman for whom prayer was offered in the memory of her soul. Therefore, the merciful one will protect her soul forever, and will merge her soul with eternal life. The everlasting is her heritage, and she shall rest peacefully at her lying place, and let us say: amen.”

All Hebrew and Yiddish is written out in transliteration. As such, it may vary from other transliterations you find.

**and come apart**  
a play in the dark

P     grandma  
       listen to me  
       keep your eyes closed  
       don't peek  
       i know it's hard  
       not being able to talk  
       not being able to see  
       i promise it'll be ok  
       just don't uncover your eyes  
       ok grandma?  
       i'll love you forever  
       i promise  
       i will i'll love you forever  
       just keep your eyes covered  
       it'll all be over soon  
       *baruch hashem*

-     -     -     -     -

Y     it's good to see you both

G     is it?

Y     presumably we've all missed one another

B     presumably yes

G     in practice-

B     please let's try-

G     what

B     to be a bit-

G     can't

B     why not?

G     terrible times  
       horrible circumstances

Y     i agree

G     do you?

Y     these are not good times

G do you think so?

Y of course

G do you really think so?

Y don't i look like i think so?

G no  
you don't

Y what do you mean?

G you're supposed to be sad

Y i am sad

G you're supposed to *look* sad

Y i do look sad

G you're supposed to look sadder  
sadder than you look now  
do this with your face

Y like this?

G no  
sadder than that

Y how sad?

G agony  
unbearable  
unmanageable  
that's what it's supposed to look like  
can't you make your face-

Y i'm trying

G try harder  
okay well  
that looks more  
constipated  
which i guess is an improvement

Y i don't understand what you-

G put your face like this

B not like She can see

G not the point

Y is this better?

G no  
you have to look  
for when you see her you have to look-

Y i don't want to look at Her  
i'm sorry i don't want to look at Her

B then don't

Y i'm covering my eyes

B good

G you're not covering-

B she can do what she likes

G one must bear witness

Y are you bleeding?

B huh?

Y Are You Bleeding?  
there's blood sopping through your-

B oh  
huh  
i guess i am

G why are you bleeding?

B i mean  
i'm not bleeding on purpose

G what caused you to bleed i mean?

B i don't remember

Y you're getting blood all over the carpet

B sorry

G don't get it on my shirt this is a very nice shirt

B not *that* nice

G this is a very nice-  
why are you being such a-

Y ok let's try to  
you know  
let's try to-

G what?

Y you know make this  
work

G why?

Y Family

G so?

Y we are Family  
after all

G sure

B let's try and-

G fuck that it's been ten years since i've/ last seen you

B eight but that doesn't mean-

Y i really don't i really don't wanna see Her

B no one is/making you sweetheart

G we all need to see Her it's/ our duty

B if she doesn't want to see Her-

G i didn't come here so she could-

B stop

G so she could simply opt out of the hard stuff

B no one's opting out

G i took pains to come here  
the Journey was not easy

B it was not easy on any of us

G and if we're gonna be stuck here-

Y who says stuck here?

G i'd like us all be able to at least look at mom

Y who says stuck here?

G they say flood warning tonight they say

Y goddamnit

G could get stuck here

B could be we'll all wash away with the corpse

G not a corpse yet  
She's not a  
She's actually still our mother  
and isn't yet-

Y on it's way don't you think?

G "it"?  
you mean "Her"

B *nudnik*

Y have you seen Her yet?

B yeah i've been here for three days now

Y what does She look like?

G what does it matter what She/ *looks* like?

Y maybe if i knew i could prepare myself and then i could look at Her

B you don't have to look at Her no one is making you look at Her

Y you just never see corpses nowadays

G the fuck does that mean?

Y i mean when was the last time you saw a corpse?

B She's not a corpse She's still mom

G like what once upon a time you saw corpses all over the place?

Y no

G just rolling off the milk carts and across people's lawns

B the doctors say we have to talk to her like she's still there  
so don't refer to her as a-

Y but not like she can hear

B we don't know that

Y will still be strange to be in the room with her  
talking to the air

B you just need to prepare yourself is all

Y one doesn't get prepared  
for death for the end of it all

B she looks like a person like a live person's body only different just a little different

Y that can't be true

B if you don't wanna see Her-

G but isn't the right thing to do  
to bear witness?

Y for whom?

B and She's not dead yet  
at the moment there's  
She in a process of-

Y is it a process?  
dying?  
is that the word for it?

*process*

like i have a *process* at work

like i *process* my paperwork

like mom She undertook the task of death

the *process* of-

G what else might you call it?

Y catastrophe

like mudslide like monsoon

like fire and brimstone

like losing all your keys

G catastrophe has to

catastrophe's gotta happen to a whole bunch of people

or it doesn't count

Y we're a whole bunch of people

G just three's not much

Y well then we're a part of a People

a People who have experienced great catastrophes throughout our history

one could argue Our People are in a state of crisis always

in catastrophe always

all of us

so one could argue

that even at the dinner table even on a perfect day we are experiencing catastrophe

B and i'd say all things considered we've got a pretty good life

Y well not now

B even now even in the/ midst of-

Y right but right now

is not the optimal

right now isn't the moment i'd use in a slide show on

Why We Have A Good Life

B i can't get the blood to clot

it keeps getting on my shirt

Y put more gauze on the wound

G what is that hat?

B what hat?

G the hat you're wearing

B oh it's-

G it's orange

B yes

G orange doesn't suit you

B i like orange

G you've never worn hats before

B i'm wearing hats now

Y it's horrible death isn't it it's horrible

G almost as horrible as that orange hat

B She had to die eventually She's old her time has come  
this isn't catastrophe this is inevitability  
so why are you-

Y right i'm not saying  
the life we lead  
in general of course  
quite privileged quite extraordinary not denying-

G exactly shouldn't deny shouldn't be ungrateful

Y not being ungrateful

B i think i have a different shirt somewhere

Y not being ungrateful not being ungrateful

G aren't you?

Y not saying our lives aren't great aren't special  
aren't saying these aren't lives of charm and grace we lead

B this blood looks darker than i remember my blood i mean  
like sewage it looks

Y and yet while all of that's true-

B was my blood always this black this thick?

G i hate your hat

Y i'm just saying that in this precise moment right now-

G stop complaining

Y I WON'T STOP COMPLAINING OUR MOTHER IS DYING

G okay

Y CAN'T I JUST BE MISERABLE

G what good's that?

Y can't this whole thing just be cock-fucking miserable  
even for a moment  
can't i just fucking hate-

G please don't exhaust me this early  
get the blood cleaned up  
i won't pay for carpet cleaning  
did you find your other shirt?

B no

Y i can't feel my fingers

G what do you mean?

Y i can't feel my fingers

B like they're numb?

Y like they're not there  
do you feel that?

G i don't think about feeling my fingers

Y if you cut them off right now  
i don't even think i'd notice  
like i've forgotten about them  
do you think grief does that?  
make you forget body parts?

G is it grief that you're experiencing?  
is it?

Y     isn't it?

G     not for me  
      please don't cut off your fingers the blood  
      there's already enough blood

B     shouldn't have worn a white shirt

Y     it's cause you're scared of blood

G     am not

Y     blood makes you retch

G     nothing makes me retch  
      i've been through war i've been through famine  
      i am implacable and retchless

Y     you've been through nothing  
      you've never been through anything

G     well our People our People have been through it all i inherit that burden  
      and who cares if blood makes me retch isn't that normal?

Y     we all inherit the same burden  
      we're all stuck with same threadbare fucking useless maggoty inheritance

G     blood doesn't bother me it's you it's Family it's this that bothers me

Y     remember when i was ten  
      i used to take mom's broach  
      press down on my thumb gently  
      until a few drops of blood came out  
      and i'd beg one of you to do the same  
      so we'd match  
      remember that?

G     no that's horrible why would you do that that's horrible

Y     not that horrible

G     there's no way you did that i'd remember

Y     it's just exploring just kids exploring their bodies

G     you couldn't have masturbated like the rest of us?

B before we go in there can we  
can we make an agreement?

G what?

B that no matter what  
no matter what happens  
we'll still be we'll always be  
Family

Y ...

G i have no clue what that means

B it's important to remember what we mean to one another

G i really hate that hat

- - - - -

P grandma touch my hand  
here right here  
just grab it  
isn't that nice?  
to hold a hand?  
you still can do that  
see?  
mommy says we should do things like hold your hand  
talk to you  
touch your hair  
it does something good for your brain  
so here hold my hand  
does that feel better  
do you feel better now?  
i want you to feel better  
to get better  
ok maybe not get  
i know you won't get better i'm smart i know you won't  
but maybe holding my hand would  
maybe that would be...

- - - - -

B hi mom  
we're all here  
your girls are all here

G She looks like shit

B stop

G She does  
She looks like shit

B don't say that

G you don't think She looks like shit?

B don't say it in front of her

G She'd want me to be honest

Y what good's "honest"?

G it's what you do for your loved ones

B so calling Her shit is  
what  
an act of love?

G look She does ok She looks like shit

B can't we all be nice today?

G do you remember the moment you realized mom-

B what?  
looked like shit?

G no  
the moment you realized she was  
horrendous?

B i've never realized that  
i'm not even realizing that now

G because young girls you know they talk about their moms  
you heard it all the time  
they talk about them  
about how magical  
about how smart  
about how courageous  
and i always thought "what are you talking about?"  
and then finally i realized  
our mother was none of those things

B i disagree i think She's a hero

G a hero?

B yes

G you call our mother a hero  
for what?  
for whom?  
what makes Her a hero?

B you know to our Family

G name one thing

B i won't be quizzed on-

G one thing name one thing

B i can't

G just wanna knows what makes Her a hero

B okay i can't please stop

G i don't want to go soft in these hours Her final hours just to appease-

B these are the things you say about the dead  
the old  
the dying  
you talk about their heroism  
their accomplishments  
their beauty  
their valor and their humility

G what if none of those things are true?

Y doesn't matter

G why?

Y 'cause it's for us ok it's for us  
this isn't for Her it's for us

G you're bleeding again

B yeah yeah i am

Y here lemme-

B no i got it i'm fine

Y lemme just-

B I'M FINE  
i'll clean it myself

Y i wanna help

B why?

Y to tend to wounds  
it's a human impulse

G savage

B i'll bandage myself

G we should discuss funeral arrangements

B why now?

G why not now?

Y why so eager to discuss funeral arrangements?

G i'm not

Y you excited to see Her dead?

G no  
because then  
there will be a lot of paperwork

B we shouldn't care about the *paperwork*

G you only say that 'cause you won't have to deal with it

B nothing's urgent right the funeral plans?

G She wanted to be buried/ in the black dress

Y are we really gonna start right in with-

G it's why we're here isn't it?

Y we're here to be present  
to be a presence

B this all feels a bit premature

G i'm just saying if She wants the black dress i should get it cleaned sooner rather than-

B not black please

G why not?

B does She have to look/ like She's attending Her own funeral?

G it's what She wanted/ i'm telling you

B i never remember Her/ requesting any specific dress

G She asked me

Y that dress is falling/ apart

G who *cares*?

B are we even certain we wanna bury Her?

Y what do you mean?

B what about crema/tion?

G are/ you fucking serious?

Y what is/wrong with you?

B thought we were discussing plans-

G we aren't cremating Her it violates tradition

B whose tradition?

G Hers

Y ours

G Our People  
burial is the way  
the only way

B not always

wasn't like that before

Y before what?

B back in the Country Before This One  
before the Desert before the Journey  
when we lived at the edge of the Forest  
in the old days mom used to say they'd line up the dead  
they'd cover them in white sheets  
and set a pack of rabid dogs on them

Y why?

B cremation was sinful  
and the ground was too cold to dig  
so they dogs took care of it

Y dog jaw unspooling flesh

G disgusting

Y where did they keep rabid dogs?

G ok so instead of cremation would you prefer a pack of dogs?

B oh c'mon don't act like we're all religious/ all of sudden

G well mom was

B religion's died out with this Family don't pretend it hasn't

G we can still uphold certain *principles*

B what principles?

G principles about the body

Y what about the green suit?

G She hates that suit

Y no YOU hate that suit

B do we have to-

G what?

B do we have to discuss it right in front of Her?

G we're not discussing it in front of Her

B She's right there

G right but She can't hear us

B we don't know that  
and even if She can't  
She's right here  
shouldn't we-

G what does/ it-

B shouldn't we keep a respectful distance?

Y what for?  
what's respectful about dying?

B one can make it respectful

G horrible bitch let Her drown in vomit

B please can we not-

G sorry sorry ok  
manners  
decorum  
i can play ball

Y can you?

G i can try at least

B we didn't keep religion when we came here  
to this New Place  
we didn't have the room we didn't have the space on our hard drives  
that was the deal when we came here  
no more whispering to idols in nighttime huts  
no more fearing ghouls hiding in the black forest

G i know the history

B who needs histories?  
what good do they do us?  
death is not a time for history

G for some of us it wasn't history

some of us were still living it before you came along

B Our People's history is nothing but catastrophe after catastrophe  
war expulsion slaughter  
endless affliction  
who needs it?  
i won't be defined that way

G even if you don't know  
even if you never saw it  
the catastrophe's already stitched into your cells  
history is just biology writ large

B it's useless at the end  
all of it  
we gave away the religion  
so can't we just cremate Her?  
'cause i don't wanna deal with Her body

Y i do  
i want to deal with Her body  
i want to clean it  
i want to wrap it in soft cloth  
i want to tuck it into the earth  
i want to do all of these things for Her

G you don't even want to look at her

Y ok maybe not me personally i won't do those things  
but i want those things done for Her

G none of those things are *for* Her  
none of them  
and you never liked mom

Y 'course i did

G don't "course i did" me  
that's not true you know that's not true  
none us did

Y i like what She stands for

G which is what?

Y the link  
to our  
our past

our collective  
you know  
whatever

G She's not a fucking metaphor  
our mother isn't any better in death than she is in life

Y dying  
in dying

G i won't martyr Her  
She doesn't deserve it  
She deserves better  
She deserves worse

B the rain's started

Y oh  
...  
wow  
coming down hard

G i hate the rain

B pray there's no flood  
mom just replaced the flooring in here

G pray we're not stuck here all night

Y *got shikt di kelt noch di kelaider*

- - - - -

P what was your grandma like grandma?  
did she pet your hair?  
did she buy you presents?  
did she tell you you could be anything when you grew up?  
or did you even have a grandma?  
were you just too old for that?  
did you just come into the world as "grandma"?  
as my "grandma"?  
i like to think of you as a kid  
in the Country Before This One  
what did you wear who did you fight with  
those sorts of things  
i wanna know all sorts of things about you  
you've got all the good stories  
the family stories

mom doesn't tell me the family stories  
so i gotta get them from you  
what can you tell us about life before this New Place grandma?  
were there parties? were there parades?  
what kind of music did you have?  
did you have fun back then?  
or was it tough scary which is why you came here?  
did you always wanna be a grandma?  
what were the grandmas like in the Country Before This One  
did they have family stories from way back when?  
and did their grandmas have family stories way back when before way back when?  
what was it like?

- - - - -

- B how long you planning to stay?
- Y dunno?  
as long as it takes?
- B as what takes?
- Y her umm
- G just say it
- Y as long as-
- G just say it just say it
- Y okay then Her dying as long as it takes Her to die
- G so what She croaks and you're outta here?
- Y not what i'm saying
- G 'course not
- Y i do have work to accomplish
- G no one cares about your-
- Y well some people do like myself
- B have you been keeping busy?
- Y keeping frantic

B that's good you're happier frantic

Y i try

G frantic doesn't sound good

Y no frantic's excellent actually

B what about you?

G are we doing this now?  
chitchatting through our deathwatch?

B yes

G ...  
i'm fine

B glad to hear it

G had to rebuild our house

B why?

G flash flood

B no

G whole house submerged

B i'm sorry that's-

G no it's fine we did all right my husband and me  
lost a few houseplants that was sad  
and our baby of course our baby drowned

Y ...

B what?

G i'm kidding

B oh  
...  
ha

G no our baby is fine  
the houseplants that was a shame

and the cat we lost the cat

B is this another joke?

G no our cat drowned in the flood  
in fairness the whole town lost their cats  
we held a wake for the town cats  
thirty-six in all lost  
it was very serious  
all the dead cats  
people took it very seriously

B i liked your cat

G this was a new cat you never met this cat

B what was her name?

G Dead Drowned Cat

Y ...

B that was her name?

G no  
that was another joke

B oh

Y these are really good jokes

B what happened to your old cat?

G fell into the stove  
this was last autumn  
a number of cats died in fire accidents  
we held a wake for those cats that year too  
cats die easily in our town

Y better than people

G right of course

B we're considering getting a cat actually

G don't  
they die  
then you have to be fucking miserable about a stupid fucking dead cat

B ok i won't

G how's teaching going?

Y good  
i moved departments

G what do you mean?

Y i'm not in the history department anymore

G but history is  
what you teach

Y used to

G our History our Family's our Peoples'  
that's what you teach  
isn't it?

Y used to  
no longer have the need  
now i'm more interested in the immediate  
the concrete  
i have no need for those old things now

G oh

Y not that it's not important

G it is important

Y not that we shouldn't shouldn't have a sense of a framework for-

G but you don't-

Y teach it anymore no

G oh

Y i mean everyone knows right  
everyone knows it's all been poured over rehashed endlessly  
the Journey from the Forest through the Desert to this New Place  
the shtetls and the hovels  
the wars and the expulsions  
the customs that come and go  
the language that's built up and crumbles

crushed underfoot again and again  
not that it's not important but it doesn't need to be endlessly-

G not endlessly of course not interested in endlessly

Y our histories have been explicated so thoroughly at this point  
what else might i add?

G well not all of it  
plenty remains inexplicable

Y i can't exist in a state of permanent remembrance

G not interested in remembrance what a horrible word remembrance  
but someone has to  
not salivate or glorify but to simply  
keep history present

Y at some point history's gotta be assimilated  
can't be ditched but can't let it trap us like dragonflies in amber

G but who does the assimilating?

B jesus you hear that?

Y someone else can do that

B rain's really picking up

G but if not you then who?

Y it's good it's a good shift for me professionally metaphysically it's very useful

G what do you teach now?

B worried the roof'll leak

Y media communications

G what the fuck is that?

B is anyone listening?

Y not quite sure yet

B did mom fix the leak?  
with rain like this-

G as long as you feel good

Y yes except  
except  
except my hair falling out

G oh?  
is it  
stress?  
aging?  
cholesterol?

B all three?

Y i don't know  
sign of the end times

B it's fine it looks fine

Y it's not fine my hair is falling out my hair is falling out and i didn't expect to care i never  
thought much of my hair i didn't like my hair i never liked my hair i never thought i'd  
mind to lose my hair but now my hair is going and i i i fucking hate how much i wish  
i had hair to do things with because i'm not vain i've never thought of myself as vain  
but all i wish i had was hair hair to be arranged hair to be played with hair to be  
teased and combed

B you'll look great bald  
you have a great skull shape

Y my body is coming undone  
i didn't see it coming

G none of us could

B bodies unravel  
that's what they do

G just look at her cheek

B i'm fine

G you should change the bandage

B don't need to i'll recover

G i remember when i was twelve  
i got my tonsils removed  
i saw them after surgery

engorged and slick  
looked like carnage  
the inside of my body like war carnage  
was the moment i realized my body was already falling apart  
at age twelve  
already falling apart

B mom never let us see  
never let us see Her body falling apart  
not till the very end

Y yep

B always hid it from us

G don't know why

B rather of noble of Her  
feigning perfection

G yes but also  
rather terrifying

Y how so?

G She feigned perfection so well so thoroughly  
made you aware unrelentingly aware of how much of a lie it was  
how much there was no way She was so strong so fierce  
no person ever was

Y She might have been  
She might have been

B crossed the Desert after all  
made a great Journey  
takes a strength

G and She brought us to this  
land of  
amnesia  
with none of the ancient texts none of the religion not of the the-

B we didn't need that we found something better

G what?

B self-actualization

G i feel like i'm forgetting what we are as a Family as a People  
i feel like living in this New Place-

B what

G hollows us out  
makes us  
blank

B not blank  
just  
unrestricted  
not boxed in

G 'course you think that

B what does that mean?

Y can't we just enjoy  
each other's company

G ...

B ...

G have we ever?

- - - - -

P i'll love you for forever grandma  
that's a promise i make  
you never really talked to me  
and when you did it was things like  
"can't you brush your hair like-"  
"why do you insist on reading about-"  
"if you wanted to do something with yourself you'd-"  
it's only because you love me  
that's what i tell mom when she asks me "will i miss you?"  
i don't know if you think much of me though grandma  
i think you like that i exist  
that one day i might have babies and they'll have babies and then they'll have babies  
so that means our Family will keep having babies forever  
'cause of me  
but sometimes i think you'd rather i couldn't speak  
little girl with her tongue sliced out  
i think you'd like that better  
did your grandma ask that of you?  
to be tongue-less?

mute?  
i like to pretend that she did  
that she took a kitchen knife and tried to cut straight across your tongue  
that she used needle and thread to stitch your mouth shut  
then it makes me less mad about how you talk to me

i do these things i make these things up in my head  
so that when i say  
“i’ll love you forever grandma”  
i can mean it

- - - - -

Y remember how She was?

B who?

Y mom?

B She was like a mother

G what does that mean?

B She dreamt of being a surgeon you know

Y really?

B yes

Y didn’t know that

B realized She didn’t have the stomach for it  
i mean the guts  
the guts for it

G do you know what’s in Her bottom vanity drawer?  
bags and bags of rubber bands  
just in case production stops i suppose  
i mean bags and bags and *bags*

Y in the Country Before This One before the Desert before the Journey  
She didn’t have such luxuries

B a rubber band is a luxury?

Y depends on which side of the Desert you’re standing on

B it’s a rubber band

Y in the times when Our People lived in catastrophe after catastrophe  
couldn't count on anything being there the next day

G and mom saw the worst of it  
worse than we could ever imagine

B yes but we've made it past those catastrophes  
this New Place has none of those

G we can't understand  
She's traversed two times  
two spaces  
two realities  
an old world and a new world  
from the stars to the atoms  
from astrology to cosmology  
from the tacky stew of history to the decay of the ever-present  
She's existed stretched across two ways of being  
She's done that which is almost inconceivable  
She's transformed herself

B wouldn't call that transformation

Y i would

B to transform yourself is almost impossible

Y you hear that?

G flood's coming  
i can feel it

Y sure it'll be fine

G or we'll all be swept away

B mom was quite the lady

G She was a terror

B not true

G She stuck mud in our mouths  
remember that?  
when She didn't like what we had to say?

B i don't remember that

- G She didn't do that by the time you came around  
i remember clawing at the steamer trunks She'd lock me in  
mud growing wet and dripping down my throat  
i'd scream through the night in the trunk
- B what'd you do?  
you must've done something
- G left the stove on  
said i could've burned down the house
- B you could've
- G is that the point?
- Y with me She'd heat teaspoons to burn my arm  
every time i swore  
remember that?
- G no it wasn't every time you swore  
it was every time *She* swore
- B our mother  
really?
- G back in those days remember this  
the streets were filled with feral dogs and cats
- Y yes of course
- G yellow coyotes who'd take babies in the nighttime  
Our People had only just arrived in this New Place
- Y everything was decay
- G restriction on jobs
- Y restriction on housing
- G restriction on worship
- Y restriction on texts
- G restriction on movement
- Y restriction to one neighborhood

G restriction to one People

Y population kept fluctuating

G mass death then mass migration

Y we lost a sister right?

G we did

B what sister?

G you didn't know her

Y we lost two right?  
two sisters?

G can't remember

Y maybe i was the second sister  
maybe i was lost

G lean times  
only the strong that's you and i survived

Y it's much better now of course  
now things are civilized  
but back then  
when She felt really wrathful  
She'd lock us out of the house all night

G mmhmm

Y said don't come inside till you learn to obey  
we'd hold each other and pray the dogs and coyotes didn't get us

G and She'd say "at least if the dogs get you i won't have to bury you"

Y funny times those were  
things are so much better now

G are they?  
are they better?  
my cat dead  
your hair falling out  
mom's dying that's also not-so-good  
are things better?

Y     maybe not for us maybe not for you and i  
      but as a People i'd say as a People we've really come through  
      we crossed the Desert made a life to live in  
      our mother would be proud  
      not just our mother but all the matriarchs and patriarchs through the generations

G     a young girl used to run around sucking out the dog's eyeballs  
      what could even be said about it those days what could even be said?

B     don't remember any of this

G     you weren't around

Y     by the time you got here-

G     things were cleaned up

Y     we as a People we were doing so much better

G     it was something to be proud of  
      how we were doing  
      by the time you came along

Y     so much better

G     what was the worst thing mom ever did to you?

B     to me?  
      god i don't-

G     not mud was it?  
      not hot teaspoons?  
      not locked out for the dogs to get you?

B     well She of course  
      scolded me

G     oh a scolding how awful

Y     help me i don't want to be here help

B     harsh words She had so many harsh words

Y     why won't anybody help me?

G     well She beat me once beat me till i wept said She'd stop beating me when i stopped crying

B     she wouldn't

G of course she would

B that must've been dad

G honestly can't tell the difference between them anymore

B no She wasn't like that with me  
mostly She was-

G yes She liked you better

B not saying that

Y actually i don't think that's true

G what?

Y i don't think that's true that mom liked her better?  
just 'cause mom beat you and never her

G bleeding again are you?

B no i'm fine

Y no i think it's just  
by the time you came along  
we'd come so far  
as a People  
had made a Journey into something like  
oh i don't know  
stability?  
tranquility?  
and She felt like  
mom She felt like She had to  
behaves herself i suppose

G still bleeding would you let me-

B I'M FINE

Y because She never stopped being cruel  
never stopped slicing under the skin  
She just stopped making it all so  
literal

B this room is freezing  
i hate it here

open the curtains  
open the windows  
i want sunlight

Y i can't  
the rain-

G how bad is it?

Y i don't know

B let the sun in please

G i can't let the sun in  
it's not there now

Y stuck here all night i suppose

G with the rotting fleshbag in the corner

Y help

G take off your bandage

B what bandage?

G the one on your cheek  
the one you're bleeding from

B why?

G take it off lemme see

B i'm good

G you're not you keep bleeding  
the cut must be deep

B it's not

G take it off

B STOP

G here/ let me-

B STOP PLEASE STOP

G just let me/ help disinfect-

B PLEASE DON'T PLEASE DON'T

G oh my god  
...  
...  
oh my god  
what's happened?

B told you a little nick nothing to-

G not a little nick  
that's

B it's fine

Y i'm alone here

G your cheek  
it's gone  
it's completely gone  
it's-

B yes

G it's like a battle wound

B well you see i  
this morning i  
this morning i found a lump

G where?

B under the skin

G oh my god

Y will you get it checked out?

B don't need to  
i cut it out

Y what?

B i cut it out  
i took a kitchen knife and cut it out

G you did this?

B yes

G why?

B didn't want it there  
had to twist the knife in deep to get to it  
the thing fell with a thump to the ground  
looked like a black stone

G was there a lot of blood?

Y please get me out of here

B no more than usual

Y help me i shouldn't have come here

B no more than the usual bleeding for jamming a knife into your face

Y i need to be saved

G there's no salvation here  
we don't do salvation  
this is Family  
that's not what Family's for

Y HELP

G you should just carve your other cheek out  
just to be safe  
in case there's another lump  
just to be safe

B yes

G plus of course it'll look so much better

B you're so right

G i could help with that  
gotta knife?

B always

Y mom wouldn't like this  
She hated blood

G no She didn't  
blood overall that was fine with Her

B this knife is good  
should do the trick

G mom could handle terrible things

Y help me out of here

G She let me drown that one time  
remember  
i was swimming in the lake  
my foot on some seaweed  
got pulled under  
kicking and flailing  
mom stood there  
placid  
didn't move  
later She'd say She was paralyzed with fear  
too paralyzed to try and save me

B i rescued you didn't i?

G no  
i died  
give me the knife  
let's cut your cheek

Y 1 2 3 4  
help me help me

B what are you screaming about?

Y HELP  
ME

G you'll be fine

Y yes you're right of course of course i'll be fine

G you're with Family  
hold still  
let's get rid of this cheek  
one  
two  
...

three

- - - - -

P grandma  
i think mom hates me  
i think she hates me grandma  
did your mom hate you?  
did you hate my mom?  
what do you think i did to her grandma?  
what did my mom do to you?  
i'm not saying i'm a good kid  
and i'm not saying i'm a bad kid  
but i just wish  
i wish she would love me the way she's supposed to  
the way i've heard she's supposed to  
the way other kids' moms love them  
i wish she could be like that  
...  
do you hate her because she got a nice house grandma?  
the kind of house you never got to have in the Country Before This One  
do you hate her because she got a nice job?  
and that she can go nice places?  
with other Nice People?  
who think she's Nice like them?  
because you've always said no one thinks we're Nice  
Our People  
but now they do  
do you hate mom because the Nice People have taken her in?  
have made her one of them?  
does mom hate me because i *am* one of the Nice People  
i don't just look like them  
i didn't just trick them  
i'm actually one of them  
do you think she hates me for that?  
because what i don't understand is  
she taught me to do that  
she taught me to be one of the Nice People  
she taught me that was my birthright  
to be Nice  
to not just be a part of Our People  
she taught my i could be bigger than just Our People  
so i am  
so i did  
and i think she hates that i did that  
but what was i supposed to do?  
we can't go back to how it was  
i like that the Nice People like me

that when they look at me  
they see someone who's also Nice  
isn't that what you wanted for us grandma?  
isn't that why we came to this New Place?

when the world ends  
at least i'll have gotten to be Nice

- - - - -

- Y bandage your cheek up
- B don't have one anymore
- Y bandage the wound then the exposed nerve
- G not that bad doesn't look that bad
- B am i healed now?  
is my body clean?
- G your body will never be clean
- Y we're all unclean now
- G all unclean in this New Place
- Y hear that?
- B what?
- Y the rain
- G worse than we could've imagined
- Y the streets are washed up
- B who says?
- Y news  
says streets are flooded  
no getting out
- G oh  
when are they expecting it to clear up?
- Y never never they're saying  
guess it's the end of the world i guess

G do they expect the sun tomorrow?

Y no  
in the coming days they're saying  
locusts and wildfire  
that's what they're saying  
a plague on all our houses

G and after the floods will come the fires  
and after the fires will come the tsunamis  
and after the tsunamis will come the hurricanes  
and after the hurricanes will come the landslides  
and after the landslides will come the tornados  
and after the tornados will come the ice storms  
and after the ice storms will come the droughts  
and after the droughts will come the earthquakes  
and after the earthquakes will come the famines

B where you getting this?

G the weather channel

B it's all a conspiracy the weather it's all a conspiracy

G no of course not

B yes yes it is never trust the weather channel they lie they all lie they meet in secret meat to  
cleave and weave tall web tales about the rain fall precipitation on the plains dry air  
in the tundra weather in the cupboard monsoons on the horizon daily high up here  
daily low down here day in day out shifting air currents temperatures thermometer  
jump all lies all lies cackling their den concocting disaster how about a tornado here  
how about a hurricane there earthquakes aren't real the earth can't move i track my  
own temperatures never the same as they eye of a storm as the teeth of a storm the  
lips of a storm they want you to scream you see they want you hold your loved ones  
and pray want you to board up the house sell all the jewelry and cry and cry and cry

G but maybe today they're right  
maybe this is it maybe this is the end

Y and where do we fit into this?  
where does mom?  
so much catastrophe before this  
how is this any different?

B never appreciated my cheek never appreciated what it did how it cut across the bone how it  
helped my eye my drooping eye never thought of all the things a cheek could do how  
it cradled my face reflected back at you dust to dust cheek to cheek

Y i knew this man once  
nice man Nice People/  
very gentlemanly hideously so  
“here’s you chair being pulled out for you ma’am”  
“here is a gift on your birthday”  
and then just as i was getting used to the idea of kindness  
just as i thought-

G *(softly until previous line completes)*  
horrible horrible horrible horrible horrible horrible horrible horrible horrible

Y well he was murdered execution style  
three bullets to his temple

B they ever catch the murderer? g

G i did it i killed him

Y why?

G he wore an ugly suit he worshipped funny ideas he put sugar on toast and anyways he  
would’ve killed you eventually all the Nice People in their bowels want us dead

Y makes sense to me

B water’s in the room

G must be the rains

B yes

G must be the flood’s begun

B oh there go my shoes

G throw your shoes away be free  
here throw your hat in get rid of your horrible hat

Y you always hated the color orange

B i want to understand how to *be* in the world  
how you could buy groceries and go to the dentist  
how you could cook dinner and calculate your tax breaks  
how you could buy lemonade from children and trim your hedges  
and do all this without an urging towards a rage directed at-  
do you understand?

Y why is She looking at us like that?

G who?

Y our Mother

G what is a Mother?

Y part of a Family

B what is a Family?

G open wide nothing comes out

Y legacies anecdotes bad blood feuds simmering rage unspoken grudges bitter bitter bitter  
shared recipes funny inside jokes funerals death bodies

G i look back i despair i look back-

B our mother looks smaller She looks smaller

G i look back and-

B shrinking faster than Our People

Y also parties also holidays also forgotten trips to the parking lot also polaroids burnt  
scrapbooks sweets on shabbos

G would you like me to cut out more of your cheek?

B why?

G even it out?

B do you think it'd look better?

G two ragged empty cheeks is grotesque  
but if they're even it's stylish

B and at the end of the world i want it said "that one had style"

G want help?

B no it's okay i've got it

G water looks blacker than i remember

B could you hand me that knife please and thank you?

G black water coming back from long long ago

B mom spoke of a great water from before  
spoke of battering rains that threatened to rip the land apart

Y panicking

G why?

Y water

G okay

Y frightened

G okay

Y anxious

G stop

Y one breath

G stop

Y two breaths

G stop

Y three breaths

G stop

Y help me

B who should help you?

Y no one here

B what is the worst thing you've ever done to someone?

Y killed a man  
no wait

B not so bad

Y high treason

no wait

B not so bad

Y parked in a handicap spot

B vile

G i once drowned my baby

Y no you didn't

G no i didn't i drowned my cat

Y no you didn't

G yes i did i lied there was no storm i drowned my cat

Y why?

G cat had beady eyes cat was out to get me cat had me in its grip i hate them all all the town's  
cats who has a need for such things as cats

B is it even?  
my cheeks?

G carve a little more out on the left side

Y why haven't you burned that fucking hat?

B i don't know

Y give it to me  
i'll take your hat  
i'll take your hair  
i'll take your skin  
pull it from your face

B i hate the color orange why did i decide on an orange hat today?  
what should i do with it?

G take it off

B not enough i don't want it in the room  
it frightens me it's luminescence it watches me i hate that hat i hate it

G you look lovely

B really?

G much better with both cheeks gone  
much better

B would you like some?

G cheek?

B yes

G no thank you cutting back on red meat

Y i'll have a bite

G had i known it would be like this i would have been so much more than i was i would have been a lot more accomplished things made a name for myself in the wild wilderness beyond the pale i would have accumulated titles and diplomas and certificates and awards i would've been crowned the king of a nation and broken barriers for all and innovated technologies and societies

B fuck you

G fuck you

B fuck you

G fuck you

B fuck you

Y fuck you

G fuck you

Y bite me

G burn me

B choke me

Y cut me

G kill me

B *ir paskudnyak*

Y i want to pull your teeth out

G i want to fry your skin off

B i want to puncture your eyes

Y i want to rip off your toenails

B i want to pour boiling oil down your throat

Y i want to feed your face to rabid dogs

B i want to shove a spike up through the middle of you

Y see your intestines fall out

B drill holes into you

Y this is Family right this is what Family is

G this is what mom is

Y whose mom?

G our mom

Y we have a mom?

G yes

Y together we together?

G yes our mother yes

Y i've never met you before in my life

G haven't you?

Y never who the fuck are you we don't have a mother together i don't have a mother i don't have a father i don't have a lineage i don't have a People who've come before me i am here i am now i am me in this now this now of me is much more than the what of me i've never had a me before me a me that precedes a Family tree a root cellar or an attic i've had none of these things

B yesterday i bought a lotto ticket because the jackpot had got to something like six million and i thought i'm not one to bet or not maybe i bet all the time i can't remember but i bought this lotto ticket i bought it and i thought maybe just maybe today will be my lucky day maybe today is the day the world turns around for me and i'm left standing stricken with six million dollars in my pocket maybe i'll win big i'll be a big winner i'll

be the person on the six o'clock news telling people how winning the powerball changed my life how now i'm a person with a lot of options too many options which is frightening because i come from shtetl folk we use all parts of the human animal so having this many choices actually is horrible actually is a cruelty it's a cruel act that freedom is an act of violence inflicted on my body and i think about buying a new car a sunken pool a summer house food for the poor a golden watch a whole new wardrobe but i don't know what to do with the money so i sit on it and friendships erode Family abandons me asking how could i be so thoughtless as to not spend it all-

G my cheek is oozing

B so i'd weep i'd weep on the six o'clock news and tell the world how terrible my life has become since winning six million dollars doesn't that sound delicious to be afforded such pain doesn't that sound-

G freezing

B who is that old woman in the corner?  
her luminescence-

Y of course freezing the water having risen up to our waists-

B i'm so sorry i'm running late

G traffic?

B no it's just who i am as a person

G i should've made more of a life for myself i should've made it so that this would all feel threatening like i had a life to threaten

Y mostly i've been kind i think  
mostly i've been good to cats and children  
mostly i've been thoughtful at sunset  
dutiful in moments of mourning  
joyful in moments of pleasure  
i've been kind banal and appropriate

B and yet you are perverse

Y yes

B how is that?

Y i don't know  
maybe in lieu of religion Our People brought perversion

G take out or delivery?  
B iced or hot?  
Y perversity of choice  
G and looking at the ancient texts-  
Y perversity of history  
B not that i'm religious  
Y perversity of erasure  
B i have clean linens at home that's something to be proud of  
G i never have clean linens  
B i could've been a temple priest a champion a queen  
G i rip my linens to shreds  
B i could've been something  
G what even is a thread count?  
B clinging to modernity though i could never-  
G *shteyner zol zi hobn nit kayn kinder*  
B could never accept the barbarity of what was-  
G *trinken zoln ir piavkes*  
B when our People die i hope it hurts i hope the jaws of history gnash our skin apart  
G *eyn umglik iz far zi veynik*  
B i hope for suffering because i can hope for nothing more  
G *zol zi krenken un gedenken*  
B and one must have you hope you see  
Y all of us lost to the black mud of ancestry  
G who are you?

B ...  
who are you?

G ...  
who are you?

Y who are you?

B who are you?

G who are you?

B who is She?

Y one scream

G i claw at my thighs

Y heart races

G make puncture wounds

Y can't sleep through the night anymore

G festering in the synagogue

Y has this room been sealed off?

G i seek worship i find none left

Y heart stops

G one sound to confirm-

B at the end of the world She'll say-

G the texts in tatters

Y never read it

B easy to love the ancient ways easier to think if i were only back then-

Y cut my tendons

B we had no wisdom to lose

G didn't we?

B Our People had no wisdom to lose they're fucking scum we're fucking scum fuck them all  
Y if we stay in this room we'll drown  
B fucking kikes we are  
Y towns burn nations burn Peoples burn it's inevitable  
B i'm burning anyways look at me just look at me  
G no  
B LOOK AT ME PLEASE LOOK AT ME  
G no  
Y She's disgusting whoever that old bat in the corner is She's disgusting  
B Her teeth  
Y disgusting  
B Her hair  
Y disgusting  
B Her mouth the way it folds at the corner as She sleeps  
G disgusting  
Y if She was ever our mother-  
B how could She have been?  
Y if She was ever a mother to us i'm humiliated by the knowledge  
G She's weak look at Her She's weak none of us are weak  
Y i don't know you  
B i want to be weak i want to break  
G we've all overcome-  
Y outside it might be there's a war on it might be that's just the way of the world streets  
are thick with rot and the air's turned foul outside it might be there's no going  
outside anymore

G i hate Her please turn Her away  
B the woman?  
G yes the hag in the corner please turn Her away from us i hate how She stares  
B i don't think She can see  
G don't care  
B eyes clouded with cataracts doubt She can see  
G turn Her away please i hate the sight of the old  
Y one day we'll be old  
G then i'll hate the sight of me too  
B not me i'll live forever  
G breath shorter and shorter begin pulling at my cuticles  
Y i wrap presents for children i should've put a bomb inside  
G rip my fingers to the bone  
Y i love children but if the world's going to end-  
G not the world just us  
B i shouldn't be here  
G just one more catastrophe  
Y i had a job i think i can't remember the job lot of paperwork i imagine  
G quiet  
Y i'm here i am i'm here  
G no help left  
Y flood coming quicker  
B and after the floods  
Y elemental it'll be

B grammar will be melded down  
G the trees will rise up  
Y eardrums will bleed and bleed  
B holy scrolls will split apart  
G voice will cease working  
Y our eyes will fall out  
B we'll all be forced to wear orange hats  
G unbearable  
B counting backwards maybe it'll all go away  
Y all of what?  
B all of everything  
Y make this stop  
B ten  
G cry out  
B nine  
G no sound  
B eight  
G throat snapped shut  
B seven  
G knees buckle  
B six  
G sin and wickedness  
B five  
G curse and affliction

B four

G no escape no escape

B three

G in the winter the snow-

B two

G -and a frozen lake at dusk-

B one

G beauty unspeakable

B one  
...  
one  
...  
one  
one  
one  
one  
one  
one  
one

G but no more winters

Y i'm still here  
it's all still here

G that's the horrible thing isn't it?

B wires crisscross through my brain and we understand we understand what is happening there  
is nothing that isn't come undone there is nothing we can't unremember there are no  
wounds we can't salt there is no cut we can't add lemon to we cannot find a way  
back home we should've never crossed the Desert we should've never voyaged we  
should've never Journeyed i miss the Forest

G and i think-

B we did this to ourselves

G of toast in the morning-

B *they* did this to ourselves-

G -of light refracted-

B our People should've never come here

G -the smell of ash-

B in this New Place-

Y if we look at trauma-

G don't look at it

Y -look at what it does to the human body-

G i miss my morning toast

Y -it's incredible anyone ever survives true despair

B haven't survived the trauma yet

Y when then?

B at least another millennia

G so much catastrophe to come

Y is it an act?

B it is it's all an act

Y we should say a few words

G right

Y we've been gathered here today after all

G yes

Y there's this thing we're supposed to watch die a thing they told me was a mother

B how was She a mother?

Y says so on the forms

B doesn't make Her a mother to me

G doesn't mean you don't say a few words

B why should i?  
G you should  
B why should i?  
G a few words kind words for the dead here they are kind words for the dying  
Y *amayn*  
G when i die i worry-  
B the black sludge gets in my shoes i hate caring about my shoes i'm not a person who cares  
about shoes  
Y wolf grin at the door  
G staining the chair  
Y an echo  
G yes i heard that  
B young girl down the road  
G heard that too  
B wailing  
Y held a toy truck  
B dead by now  
G like my cat like my baby  
Y who got her?  
B flood maybe?  
Y or one of us?  
G chair stained with what?  
B history  
G minor histories  
B histories within histories

Y told you ditch history can't use it anymore

B i keep it locked by my bed

G in my bedside table is a gun

B how sad how predictable

G i'll never use it but it's nice to feel the weight of a trigger

B how horrifying how pathetic

G it's winter i'll miss most

Y this idea of love-

G *feh*

Y have you found what to do with it?

G love is a party with no good balloons

Y it's time to sign the thank you letters

B not enough time

G no time like the present

Y the present is a gift

G if a raven dies on your doorstep-

Y plague leaks in

B bubonic ebola influenza cholera

G -what does that mean?

B i can't bear the thought of leaving anything behind  
please burn everything i own

Y worship comes thundering down the mountain

G and anyways it's words i'm frightened of-

B remember when the milk only cost-

G masochism of clicks and clacks

B -and the goats in their pens-

G i'll remember my hair always i'll remember it always

B i'm frightened to be in this body i'm frightened to be in Her body

Y twelve blind men arrive at the door-

G She knew there'd be thrashing so She welded Her arms to the bed

Y twelve blind men with twelve blind kingdoms-

G bleed me out

Y do you let them in?

G absolutely not

Y sing Zion down

B do you carry stones for the river?  
do you carry kerosene for the match?

Y wouldn't want to be unkind

B in the wake of disaster what good's kindness?

Y people tell me always of love and how it saved them

G are we being saved?

B never getting out of here

Y when will people notice i'm gone?

B on a scale of one to ten?

G draw your card

Y card says

B Ace of Cups

Y card means?

G joy fulfillment

B card lies  
Y every insect lies  
G breath in  
Y landslide in the distance  
G breath out  
Y hold me hold me  
B i'll keep waiting till it's my turn  
G i'm trying my best  
B draw blood please hit till you draw-  
Y if you insist  
G an incision  
B cut deeper  
G a neck snaps was it someone you knew?  
Y they whisper about it of course it's so terribly interesting  
G there's a wolf in my bed grandmother  
B the grandmother's the wolf  
G soon we won't have a need for beds  
B we'll sleep in the dirt  
G be so resentful of the comforts we came to need  
Y monsoon approaches in the distance  
G question-  
B no sound  
G question-  
B no sound being worse than the sound of-

G question-

Y death bell tolls and i vomit in the synagogue

B hope your insides come apart

Y stomach undone by a house of worship

G taste?

B orange hat

G smell?

B missing hair

G touch?

B old age

Y it's horrible to think of Her skin

B i think of myself as a scream i'm already vanishing

G a few words for the dying please

B cactus bookworm banana tectonic plate

G good words all of them

B you've hurt me you've hurt me

Y what else is Family for?

G siblings through and through

Y thick and thin

B high and low

G the water's risen too-

B i imagine going outside i imagine wandering through the streets

G i'll laugh at your children's graves

B are there streets anymore?

Y be tender tend to me  
G your pain being a diversion from-  
B are there homes are there Peoples are there histories we can cling to?  
G i miss my cheek  
B i miss my hat  
Y i miss my hair  
B in the Country Before This One there was a need for-  
Y water keeps rising-  
B but this New Place had no room for any of it  
Y wash us away  
B and i think-  
Y finally be clean  
B how i blame my mother-  
Y let it take us  
B if She's a link She's a broken one  
Y dance in the flood  
G not broken  
B as though we never had a People  
G not broken  
B 'course She is  
G you weren't there  
Y finally be free  
G weren't there for when we crossed over  
B to hate your People is the worst sin of all

Y rise higher rise higher

B but i do i hate them

Y can't carve it out of you

G we'll be a People again

B dearly beloved we are gathered/ here today-

Y *al molay rachamim/ shochayn bam'romim*

G she was beautiful she hoped for so much for us

B -in/ remembrance of-

Y *ham-tzay m'nucha/ n'chona al kanfay hash'china*

G -which made what came next-

B -loving mother/ to three daughters-

Y *b'ma-alot k'doshim ut-horim/ k'zo-har haraki-a mazhirim*

G how she whittled us down-

B -devoted denizen/ of a wandering people-

Y *et nishmat bat/ she-halcha l-olama*

G trauma upon trauma-

B ancient witness to a/ lost world-

Y *ba-avur shenodvu/ tz'dakab b'ad hazkarat nishmatah*

G inheritor of all our catastrophe-

B -she'll be missed dearly

G *b'gan Ayden t'hay m'nuchatah  
la-chayn ba-al harachamim yas-tire-ba b'sayter  
k'nafav l'olamim, v'yitz-ror bitz-ror  
hacha-yim et nishmatah ado-nay  
hu na-chalatah, v'tanu-ach b'shalom  
al mishkavah  
v'nomar*

B *amayn*

G *(delicately)*

She dreamt of joining the world at large/ that was Her dream said we would be just like  
them couldn't keep us as rats anymore said we'd let the sun shine on us that's what  
She said said they've kept us forever and ever in shit and dreck She said we'd inherit  
the earth that the whole world was ours we could be any kind of people we wanted  
not just the frightful not just the anxious not just the obliterated we could be like the  
Nice People drained of history and free to claim all but She never accounted for how  
they never wanted us never accounted for how we stuck up the machinery soured  
the milk how we made the Nice People nauseous how we could never escape their  
suspicion that we snuck in the back door She believed we could be Our People and  
Nice People thought we could be both and we just can't anymore if we ever could  
we have nowhere to go we don't belong here but we have nowhere to go no Country  
Before This One no Country Before That no home in this New Place if the world is  
ending then so be it no one will have a home anymore we've been cast out why not  
everyone else

B *(softly until previous line completes)*

rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's  
coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's  
coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's  
coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down rain's coming down

G i long for no homeland no final destination no ancient sites no pilgrimage just an  
untethering to be the stranger the wanderer the gravel in their shoe we will wander  
out stretch across the globe so thinly no catastrophe can reach us never being Nice  
we will wander out forever the three of us and all Our People and forever be the  
stranger wherever we go not always being safe not always being welcome but always  
being-

B rain's coming down

G but always being free

Y look at the rain  
i think we're drowning

- - - - -

Y what do we do with mom?  
what do we do with Her?  
there's nothing left  
what do we do with Her?

G She's almost dead anyway

Y     yes  
      She is

B     *(a long pause)*  
      burn Her

G     yes

B     burn Her  
      and open the windows  
      let the sun in

-     -     -     -     -

P     grandma  
      grandma you can open your eyes now  
      go ahead  
      uncover your eyes  
      unshroud yourself  
      c'mon  
      take it off  
      it's ok now

*(the audience removes their blindfolds  
the stage may or may not be designed like a bedroom  
the stage may or may not be designed like a room at all  
it may or may not be filled with debris of all that has happened  
but there are no people  
nowhere at all)*

P     you're all alone now grandma  
      isn't that wonderful?

*(the lights grow too bright)*

*(blackout)*

*(end of play)*