

SUICIDE IS PAINLESS

Disappointment in the world is no kind of option
for those with one foot always, already out the door.
The first time I felt undone by death, the swampy odor
of half-baked horse dung set the mood. There's no potion

or elixir, no counter for the mind's insurgent drive
to fabricate its own demise. You think you've quashed it,
at long last—those feral, furtive sentries of disquiet—
but no, not so: they lie in wait, for you to divert

shoddy defenses to other fronts, unfriendlier fires.
And then they pounce. One morning, I'm standing at the elbow
of 59th and Fifth, above the N train and below
the penthouse suites, the Francophilic and serif-

heavy entablature of the Plaza Hotel. A beet-faced
coachman curses a piebald horse and morning traffic.
June extracts its pinch of salt, summer's generic tariff.
The curb-side runnels swell with run-off, milky decaf,

from last night's late-night frog-choking deluge. Then, apropos
of nil I'll ever know, I imagine myself, mindless
but full of intent, step from crowded curb into dross-limned
street, the squawking maw of the AM rush, one more poor sap

lost to the hurl and burl. But instead of viscera,
carnage, I carom—between sloe-black Town Car, saffron cab—
and ascend, on a feather bed of distillate carbon
and noxious oxide, far above the veins and varices

of the lower-most reach of the Upper East Side.
Exult. Depart. Those clammy nights of idiot panic
about *the void* were nothing next to the dizzy catnip
of my vision. What do you make of a—is it disease?

morbidity?—that fills the chest with boundless levity,
endless light? Death is scariest when it ceases to scare.
Behind me, the captive wild of Olmstead's preening acres
was mere *idea* of order, a flimsy, pretty veil

between what's ours and what cannot be. I no longer
daydream of traffic. Now, out among weekday rank-and-file,
along Walnut or down Broad, I offer my life
to every stranger passing by and, no Goneril

or Iago among them, earn my prize: a serried dagger
to the chest. It could be anyone—that callow banker bro
chuffed in fleece or fresh-scrubbed ER nurse, a day-drunk broker
half-hard with thoughts of easy credit—that I've dragged,

unwitting, into service. It's a democracy,
like all democracies, in name only: my assassin's
hand does my own arm's bidding. A sin's a sin's a sin,
of course, but whatever shape it takes—knife, car, comedy

or tragedy—the lessons all align: I'm both nature
and what nature abjures. At least fifty percent terrible,
this world, our poems tell us, and such a bitter, brittle
existence might explain a lot though the more mundane truth

(no?) is poets make a Sunday meal of disappointment
and, too, are shit at math. If the world tilts half-awful
then so do I (and you) and late, sleepless, fitful, awash
in proxy sirens and deep in the blast-pit dopamine-

dearth that attends even the most modest of pleasures,
I'll remember a feckless cruelty now decades deep.
Ugh, die intones the reclusive, germinating grape seed
of some neural node and, like that, cortisol-perfusates

flood My Emergency District. Once, at a boonies dive,
I turned to three women heckling me from a banquette booth
and asked: can you *spell* fluoride? I got a laugh and the boot.
They meant no harm. Cruelty flowed through me, a fine-grained sieve,

and—so, so selfless—I let myself believe my poems
were the precious residue left in its wake and, worse,
that this too was fine. (And so our antihero wanders
the misty fens of memory, or, in layman's terms, mopes

about with soggy feet.) It wasn't fine but that's okay.
Older, impartial as an Olympic judge, I throw out
top- and bottommost scores, offer this middlebrow outro:
it's a misery-courting form of fallacy, to ask

that absent gods grant us the world we deserve or demand.
May you instead sleep the carefree sleep of a well-fed cur
who dreams, like flickering fire, of the fear-laced fur
of a lazy hare. The world's just the world or I'll be damned.