

From *Until It Does Us In*

Introduction

*How is it we evolve from violence?
Victim or perpetrator – is the act
passed down genetically so that we sense
the memory of what occurred as fact?
Two generations after they were killed,
you killed yourself. What kind of line connects
your death to theirs? What kind of force compelled
your actions? Is it something that corrects
in time? Or is our situation set:
what happened long ago remains today
indelibly in ways we can't forget
inscribed forever on our DNA?
It burrows in our hearts and in our skin
and doesn't stop until it does us in.*

1

2012 - Massachusetts

The orange jar of pills. The sweetened drink:
you, lying in your bed, my cousin, Michael.
A fallen tree, the putrefying trunk.
The shades pulled down. The note left on the table.
The coroner's report: a week or more
since you died; body petrifying
in its final, contorted shape. The locked door,
the bitter privacy of your dying.
Seventy years after our great grandparents
were taken from their homes, forced into pits,
smothered in the great cacophonous silence
of corrosive earth, what brought you to do this?
Oh devastating accident of birth!
The dead tree decomposes into earth.

12

1942 - Brona Gora

Shadows stretched: long limbs in morning sun;
a walking forest emerging from the trail
on muddy grass, dew shimmering green and brown,
long shadow bodies, heads providing frail
tree tops on the ground, the beards, the hats,
the headscarves, little girls' long flowing hair
a forest canopy captured in shadow that
filled the meadow's crevices everywhere.
There were so many. Shadows flowed like liquid
until forced into the ditches, ordered to lie
like cordwood. Shot. Blood seeping into mud
beneath a crisp and clear October sky,
the Jews of Brest Litovsk; the German gun.
The shadows dwindled, thinned. Then there were none.

24

2013 - Massachusetts

I want to love you, want to understand,
to kneel beside you and cry,
to clasp your hand at the end -
one honest, helpless gesture before you die -
to implore the courier of souls
for mercy, to pluck a yellow star
from a blood soaked sleeve torn by bullet holes,
to let the witnesses see who you are:
child of my mother's sister
walking slowly in silhouette,
the sun behind you and the others, walking past the
wilderness we vow to never forget
and then forget, through the turbulent weather
that blows the scattered leaf piles back together.

