

Recite Every Day

1

2008 - Massachusetts

The rabbi asks how she's doing with her soul
Now that she's reached end stage cancer,
meaning: is she ready with God? She's pretty well
come to terms, I say. A passenger
like a Russian doll inside a Russian doll
arriving at the last one, finally.
What about you? the rabbi asks. I'm fine with it, and all
the rest of it at forty-seven is ancient history.

Skipping work to go to Costco, buying
her a high definition TV,
hooking it up, teaching her the clicker, crying
all the way to the car. Bullshit. History
is one teetering log from flooding in.
Here I am reliving it again.

22

1973 – Massachusetts

Nightshift nurse, you slept on the couch during the day
and I was of the age and curious.
You wore a long skirt. This is the way
I remember it. You had turned your face
into the couch's rough cloth, lips brushing the checkered pattern
as I brushed your ankle, lifting the hem, pulling up,
fingertip running slowly across the nylon
until I reached your knee and stopped.
Three days before you died, after your stroke,
when I helped you to the bathroom from your bed,
your legs blue through paper skin, I had to look,
in order to clean and change you, where I once had
turned away. A streetcar stops outside.
The passengers spill out of it like blood.

2008 – Massachusetts

I'm supposed to recite Kaddish every day
for a year. I managed a week,
tallit, teffilin. Golem of clay,
rise from the marshes, speak
the names of the dead
so that they may stand beside you.
Speak the whispered name of G-d.
Beloved Sarai, who
welcomes all to the tent,
welcome me and welcome Siossa, your daughter.
Allow us to repent,
allow us teshuvah.
She, for not being here,
I for failing her the year.