Axis I
optimism

The basis of optimism is sheer terror
– Oscar Wilde

surviving a plane crash
is good for you

when the plane crashes into the sea
the sea is the least of your worries

the pilot announces
I have nothing in front of me

golden time starts
ninety seconds to get naked
ninety seconds to become a bird

there are never enough parachutes
you won’t fall into another’s arms

nylon has low melting points
slender males will fare best

once you are in the water
there is cause for concern
whistling attracts sharks

the objective is to rest the sky
eyes open and then close
out of danger

thinking. using a microwave. drinking. not drinking. voices from the pillow. not talking to yourself. talking to yourself. talking to taxi drivers. parenting. going to a lecture. enjoying it. declaring yourself a legend. believing it. sensing you have an erection when you don't have a penis. wanting a father when you already have a son. urgently responding to group emails. answering the phone on the toilet. thinking you are being followed in a closet. delusions of genius. delusions of suffering. delusions of sudden joy. wanting to drive into trees. seeing oneself in road kill. saving money to buy time. catching trains to make a plane. waking up as exercise. running your car into the front wall of a pub. collecting disinfectants. playing Duran Duran at a party. owning books and reading magazines. booking your own funeral. getting a career before you take drugs. sitting in a therapist’s chair. your therapist telling you about his trip to Europe. not smashing him with his hatstand. jumping from the 1st floor headfirst. hitting the ground. never jumping at all. fishing. golf. jet skis. shopping malls. the TV is your best friend. after sex you leave your body. after sex you roll away. tapping your feet under tables. jigging. vacuuming. daily. even weekly. bookshelves in alphabetic order. vinyl without scratches. clean kitchens. the endless ringing. the saw in your head. owning a cat. owning a speed boat. marrying your childhood sweetheart. owning anything. sharing your bed with someone you despise. not sharing your skin with someone you desire. cricket scores affect your affect. mood swings at playgrounds. swimming in the bath. crashing into the void. counting stars. searching for your self online. calling friends and telling them the
truth. eating cheese as a way out. antidepressants for dessert.
drinking coffee to relax. not going down swinging. clapping
at weddings. praying. often. believing.
the Special

What is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying
– Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

people are most likely to go between the hours of two and four when like meat left on the stove the body slows down and the core temperature cools

not suicides that is when they wake, active wanting to talk wanting to apologise and rage as you – the Special – move closer to the window without moving at all

this guy telling me he wants to jump will probably break his legs

but it is the ones who wake up happy with an epiphany smiling, even laughing that make you reach for the buzzer nurse creeps in sedates under half-light
I have seen enough stomachs charcoaled
to put me off life-drawing for life

one week a patient launched himself from the 5th floor
didn’t even put his hands out
hit the concrete with his face

sometimes the future looks brighter
if you don’t look at all

another out-patient
told me the nurses
were serving up the other inmates as food

I felt this was feasible
(nurses rarely bare their teeth)
until he asked if I wanted coffee
and started grating soap into a cup

part of you is never ready
(shoes in bed, sweating on the call)
to watch white sheets rise and fall
count breaths, early morning handovers
the death clocks ticking
the Psychiatrist

the Psychiatrist can sign you away
the Psychiatrist can give you a script
or several pills depending on the diagnosis

pills to start having an erection again
pills to stop obsessive thoughts and irrational beliefs
such as the world is going to end or
the sink is dirty like a big wet asshole

the Psychiatrist can give you a title
the Psychiatrist can give you a new name
so that when you start barking on the train
you can introduce yourself on your own terms

when you are at its desk
it will not smile but will frown
if you say I’m not happy
if you say the small pills make you feel small
it will only frown more

the Psychiatrist is a doctor
the Psychiatrist can take your pulse
or remove your kidney should the situation arise
more likely they will take your money, insisting
you should be okay in twelve months
but something will always be wrong with you
Jack, the Moon

I’ve moved into the shed
he said, fast and from a distance beyond
telephone wire and cars.

Listen to this and I could hear Perry Como
needle sharp
bouncing off hollow tin walls.

The back shed. It’s better out here.
I’ve brought the phone out so that we can talk.
He sounded more triumphant than drunk
a man who had drawn a thin line then crossed it.

I asked him about the lack of windows
and whether Nan knew about the relocation.
He didn’t hear me, manic and proud
sitting on a camp bed with the insects.

I’m going to stay out here. I’m going to press tongues!
David, look at what I have done. I’m in the shed!
Blood lithium free and cycling
machine gun thoughts, all buttons pressed at once.

Madness is not fully measured by the harm done,
it’s in the beauty only lunar suns undo.
Who was I, at seventeen, to deny the ascent.
nobody whistles in the dark

lights out and try to remember where you came from. visiting hours are between five and ten. park out front, near the row of palms designed to stop the mobile tower across the road from stealing thoughts. you enter. the nurses at the front desk are nice except for the tight blonde one – she’s a Nazi, lips grip her face but she never smiles, doesn’t let anyone out for a quick smoke or to chase the blue cars. the smell tells you that people have shit themselves here as if they have something to fear. underneath that smell another – rusted metal, maybe aluminum, the steel plate screwed into somebody’s skull. in the muffle of the courtyard there is a flat soccer ball, a strip of grass and a painted tree. sometimes sky. the first to approach is a Chinese man with a backpack. he crouches next to you, reaches in producing religious pamphlets and yellow finger paintings. I like people you don’t have to fight to get close to he whispers in your ear. he has been mistaken for a death ceiling, he’s way too gone to stay here long. the guy across the way is counting his cigarettes and then his fingers and then his cigarettes. the mathematics of hope. Katie is in the corner. she crawls under the table when everyone’s looking. her hair is matted and somewhere in there is what has been taken. the nurses regard all family with suspicion, everyone is paranoid including you. a storm is predicted for tomorrow and the bed wetters will get up first. the loss of agency, the Seroquel mandala, the thoughts that walk. her brother is here to guide you. you’ve met a lot of people but never for the first time in the shower. This is where I get naked he says pointing at the showerhead. in his room he strips, shows you the map of his strong back and the anchor tattooed on his neck. he tells you
that you get it and you do, it could be you dancing on the jetty with your eyes out. there are many rooms here but few exits, bulbs dim in the bedrooms before dark. *The gentle ones are harder to hide, they will be moved on, they never last long.* he is wiser than a pack of tarot cards and every expert on television. moving down the hall, the names change and texta marks run, on every door a new child. there are no corners here nor edges. breakfast is served at seven, constipation is more than a condition, everything is stuck. the faster you move round here the faster they come. in the ward no new words are welcomed, you can talk like a salad but you can’t ask for water. even if you sing Patsy Cline, no-one will listen. doctors pass themselves off as cleaners, pills in the lining of pants, sex in a cupboard. another uniform, another vision. the other day the intern psych with the rimmed glasses said *Tell them what they want to hear* but they all have textbooks for ears. as you get up to go her brother says *Only dogs get this frequency, they have the right range.* he is getting ready to go too but they don’t green light you unless you can’t walk in your sleep. heading back out to the car park he follows, six foot two, asks passers-by if they have seen the low-flying bats in formation or heard the silent satellite. you’re not sure which is closer to heaven, no God has authority in this dominion. you get into the car and turn on the ignition – as he disappears in the rear-view mirror, he is not smaller than he appears.
lion

enter the tangle
stay in groups, make sure you’re alone
bare your fangs, smile with tiger eyes
do not feed the lion

creep towards the moon
recall that animals react poorly
to the smell of their own blood
do not wound the lion

get down on your haunches
count the steps you haven’t taken
ask tour guides about refunds
tell your captor you’re not leaving

fold the corners of your mouth
into paper cages
birds without flight offer you feathers
do not chase the lion

light the distress flare
throw a rock at your reflection
roar at your childhood wasteland
do not tame the lion

100 yards away is still too close
rapid movements, excited talk will do
take all the above steps then appear larger
by raising the roof of your head
if you ever stop praying
may as well start hunting
blessed is the lion that becomes
the man that it has eaten
the moth’s song

at the end of the appointment
I notice that my psychotherapist
has a framed trilogy of hawk moths
above the couch where I lie

I tell her it reminds me of The Silence of the Lambs
she thanks me for such associations
having spent the session disclosing prior sin
a jumping spider to a crimson rose

how long did Jung hum the song of the moth
before his lips became a lady’s garden
and every meat flowered?

I want to ask next session if she knows
the sensation of such a moth in one’s mouth
beating desire down the dark river of the throat
to drown such terror and beauty before it transforms

I’m not sure I can afford to ask my therapist
more about death or what it costs to be eaten
she doesn’t have any answers and I don’t ask questions
every time I go I leave another part behind:
chafed lips, baby teeth, the bruise of hindsight

soon she will have enough flesh
to form her own opinion
RSVP

You

Seeking a relationship with a Psychotherapist

My current relationship status Hyper-vigilant

My height Reduced

My body type Venus flytrap

Do you have children One previous episode

My personality I like it when you smile, I love it when you don’t

My hair

My eyes A colour that doesn’t run

My desires Citrus fruit but not in a weird way

Religion Marked obsessive traits

Pets Mild panic attacks

Zodiac sign Cipramil