

TAIJE SILVERMAN

Spiritual Evaluation

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE BEEN THE VICTIM OF WITCHCRAFT,
ENVY, THE EVIL EYE, OR BAD LUCK, COME INSIDE
AND GET A SPIRITUAL EVALUATION.

—*sign on the Church of Jesus Christ in the Lord, Philadelphia*

Did you want this baby?

There are a certain number of questions you may pass over
without forfeiting your score on the test.

Do you understand that metaphors involving hummingbirds
are not useful? Do you understand

that you are in no way related to hummingbirds?

If this baby is the size of an a) eraser or b) apricot
or c) memory, will you be able to determine

whether on the day after the hurricane,

the river was as full as a river can be

without flooding the ramp to the bypass?

Heavy rain has been known

to push hummingbirds into bodies of water,

causing them to drown. Hummingbirds

remember each flower they have visited

and on average they visit 1,000 flowers a day.

Define, in one word, your relationship with the unbelievable.

Do you think you have been the victim of witchcraft?

There is a limited number of questions

you may choose not to answer.

Calculate the amount of water in a bathtub

if one eighth of it drains at one half of the speed

that the water now flows down the river.

You have one hour and nine months.

You have six months. You have the evening.

When you hear the words *count down*,

do you think of the moon? When you picture the moon,

do you see its surface or a not inhospitable orb

that alternates in size according to proximity with rooftops?

This problem is commonly referred to as *moon illusion*.

This theory is generally known as *shape constancy*.

With the shape of your body please prove that the moon does not generate its own light. Do you like charades? If this baby is a girl, what.

If this baby is a boy. Do you think you have been the victim of bad luck?

Describe in five words what this baby will fear if this baby is an apricot. List everyone it will love if it is an eraser. Will this baby's smile be like

- a) the furniture in your basement or
- b) someone dead whom you loved more than you love the baby. Explain what it means to love someone more.

Grief

Let it be seeds.

Let it be the slow tornado of seeds from the oak tree
by the gates to the playground in May wind.

Today is mother's day and someone said it is almost impossible
to remember something before you know the word for it
and the babies in their mothers' arms
stare at the seeds and they don't know
the word for falling. Nor the word for sudden or whirling.

Let it be something that doesn't last, not the moon.

Let it not be the rooftops that are so quiet.

Let it come to the white doorstep like rain and slide
onto the sidewalk not knowing. What is gentle if not time
but it's not time that is gentle, what will happen in the future
does not matter. Cicadas underground are called nymphs
and their wings look like tree seeds. Trapped under skin
and as soft as the dirt that surrounds them.

Teneral is a word for the days between
when the cicada digs its way out of earth and begins to sing
and when its self and shell are still
a single, susceptible thing. It is impossible
to remember. Let it be the years
underground, molting nymph skin
and moving in the soil without sound.

It's not time that is gentle but what unknown sign,
a method of counting each spring through the roots of a tree.
How they learn from the taste of a root's juice the moment
when in one rush they should push up to earth.

Teneral, meaning not yet hardened, a sense before a memory
of the shell. Let it be the sign in the cells
of the blind safe skin, the limbo of gold
walling here and there, where the baby waits
between a mother's body and the air's tears, he came
to my breast and rested, there was no before.

Let it be the gold room with its lack of door, that time
of day, cicadas will wait until sunset to break through the dirt.

Where did he go while I pushed?
We stood in the tunnel of seeds, windmills, a tree
had come to make promises. Rain to stone, rain to street.
They seemed while they fell to be lifting and we waited, watching,
the baby without words for what we were seeing.
Seeds pushing roots, brick, and dirt don't say
what they know about time. Rise. For days the whole town will sing.