

# **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 1<sup>st</sup> 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. jiggling. 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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*