

Human Race

There is no art for art's sake. There are no, and cannot be "free" artists, writers, poets, dramatists, directors or journalists, standing above the society. Nobody needs them.
—Uncle Joe Stalin, patron of the Arts

You cannot control what you will remember.

Today it snows and the snow collects
on the branches. In a room facing the street
two girls play, their sentences and laughter

mix with the sound of our neighbor
shoveling who is my father shoveling
snow on our driveway and me looking
out the window of my room above

the garage at my father's dancing body
making the shovel look light when it is heavy
The scent of fried onions and boiled potatoes
rises up the stairs. My mother stands

at the kitchen counter squeezing
a lemon over salad greens
the space between her teeth suddenly larger
than yesterday, and sometimes she'll say

*I will call the dentist to see how much it would cost
to fix the space which always surprises me
because there is nothing about her
that I think needs to be fixed.*

Just as my daughter says *do not color
the grey with red because you are beautiful
mommy, no older than 35 plus, right?* She
winks at me and this wink is sublime,

the Meru of my world. As the lentil soup
simmers I read Brodsky's Nobel speech,
something has led me to him today. I read too
how Lenin denounced his poetry as *pornographic*

and *anti-Soviet* and sent him to a mental institute,
He was charged with *social parasitism* in his 1964 trial.
Today I open my eyes at 7:14, our black tuxedo
cat named Shai, which means *gift* in Hebrew,

is coiled up beside my body, his sleepy
bedroom eyes already full of the impending snow.
I bury my face in his fur and inhale deeply.
My feet touch the cold bathroom tiles. I pee

and brush my teeth. Today I baked gluten-free
brownies with two little girls who stirred and licked
the bowl the way I did when my mother and I
baked almond crescent cookies. I see her

strong hands rolling the dough into little moons
and dusting the hot crescents with confectioner's sugar.
Today I graded papers, made dinner, lit the Hanukkah candles,
watched my husband shovel snow, hoping he would not get a

heart attack and saying so: "Be careful not to get
a heart attack," I say as he slips the one leather glove
that remains from last year's gift onto his right hand.
"And what about your other hand?" I ask him as he

opens the door. Either he did not respond or I do
not remember or it was the wind or the snow or
the girls playing with the Barbie Adventure House.
And later while my daughter dreams upstairs,

I work as a poet downstairs, and thankfully, no one,
not even my lost parents, cares. My father
steps aboard a boat named the Noemi Julia.
He is 19, a boy from Berlin who loves to tinker

with clocks and radios. In 1939 he steps on a boat
that will take him to Cyprus with onions on his breath.
I think of my father as I chop onions. The girls are hungry
and stand waiting for hot brownies. My eyes tear. Why

are you crying, Mommy? Are you sad that the snow
will turn to ice? Are you sad Alexandra cannot stay
for dinner? The girls sit at the table, their feet do not
touch the floor. Chocolate at the corner of their pink mouths.

They lick their fingers. *No thank you, yes please,*
I don't care for milk. We live for each other
or not at all. My mother died before she
fixed her teeth. I buried her as Jews do

in a plain pine box. I kiss her cold face. I say words
in Hebrew I don't fully understand that have to do
with God, mercy, memory and peace. Since they
lowered the lid I have never been the same.

I do the dishes after my daughter sleeps.
Outside red and white Christmas lights
blink on and off. Snow covers the city
streets. My dead are never far from me.

Joe, this is my art for art's sake—
a woman's tears chopping onions,
remembering for the future of girls
and their polite dangling feet.

On an average winter day
with the omniscient missing God.