

Exam God Hands You While Dawdling Before the Pearly Gates

1. Mother crouches, moonswept, on the ledge of a bedroom window. The ceiling light has been screwed on too tight. The thought of light orbits the bulb, her head, like a satellite around a black hole. Under her tongue, grief sits, still as a mine. A star explodes six billion light-years away.

- a. If a sinkhole swallows her house, will her throat or her diary find the opposite sky first?
- b. If she believes she can fly, how much faster will the metaphor take to die?
- c. Retell this scene from the star's perspective. Do not use any glass instruments. Remember: your distance from God does not matter.
- d. Why do you mourn death before it happens?

2. Mother paces by the fireplace, trying to discern words she erased centuries ago. She lathers her eyelids in oil to see better, holds the paper up to flame. A tiny scar heals every time a comet sears by. She cannot tell a blessing from a cataclysm delayed; she doesn't know it's her decision to make.

- a. Swallow a compass. Do you reach for the flame or the ashes flickering around it?
- b. Afterwards, she leaves the door open enough for a hair of sky to slit through. What can you see?
Choose all that apply.

- i. A splintered chair leg
- ii. The top and bottom of an empty frame, stretching to find a name
- iii. Obsolete counterfeit silver
- iv. A beating heart, slathered in ink

3. Mother never recovered from her summer insomnia so she's swimming in a lake, midnight lacing her blood. A warp in time wounds tighter and tighter, the nape of her neck at the center. The waves split her body into ten identical reflections. All are conscious. None can be watched without fragmenting further.

- a. As Mother crawls out of the lake's mirror, calculate the potential energy stored in the blue of her eye.
- b. Approximate the diameter of her skull. What is the uncertainty of your answer?
- c. What will happen to her when the universe implodes? Do not think too hard.
- d. How many versions of yourself can you carry before your body turns into your mind?

4. Mother swallowed too many planets and now she's clutching a tree: bodies incompatible with the weft of history cling together. Sap taxidermies her legs like poetry to a childhood home. During each blood test, she mistakes *anemia* for *mania*, rips out most of her hair. In enough time, children will mistake the scarlet crystals on the boughs for frozen fruit and throw away all their groceries.

- a. If you vivisect the tree, how many incomplete rings will you find?
- b. Identify and correct the error in the following statement: *With her upturned palm Mother has quenched her desire for sun.*
 - i. It was not her *upturned palm*, but the *first dead branch* that broke the sky.
 - ii. Replace *sun* with *the shadows each of her burning limbs cast*.

iii. Desire is not *quenched*, but *distilled*.

c. Who will not starve?

X. Mother drives towards the ocean. The direction of the wind is arbitrary; its intention is not.

a. Will she pass into heaven or beyond?