He, Li, Kr / Ba-Ba-Ba-Ba-Barium / 
Cortisol: This Is Only a Test

Marjorie Maddox

He, Li, Kr*

Oh, how they raise you, 
how they fly you as high 
as a storm cloud goodbye-ing 
that seaside sun that burns even 
the underside of your tongue with lies; 
oh, how hi-ho, hi-ho, it’s off to that other world 
we go and go again with their latex-binding, 
balloon-bulging, hope-rising into BURST, 
into plummeting back to earth, no more Superman, 
super woman, fingering that precious pill; buoyant 
or weighty gas; fictitious cousin, kryptonite; 
all of it poisonous after all: the light, the heavy, 
the pumped glee pulsing, plunging 
all the way down 
to now.

*Hellium, Lithium, Krypton
Ba-Ba-Ba-Ba-Barium

Yes, you must
swallow
it whole,
the chalky milkshake
of poem waving *hello/*
*so long* to pharynx,
to angst-raddled tongue,
to the long sticky slide
of esophagus,
to the tumultuous
ballads of stomach,
refrain of duodenum—all the way
to highlight and insight,
to the *Uh, Oh*
of X-ray or the surprised sigh
of caesuras,
decimated now
by the Ba of periodic charts
coated in stealth mission,
by notes diagnosed,
by your mute, broken body
rising up *ba-ba-ba-ba barium*
in understanding,
in hope, the memorized days
of College Chemistry
finally swaying, finally
swinging, singing its healing
*rockin’ and a-reelin’* epiphany
of almost-forgotten,
gloriously healthy, end-
of-the-tunnel,
now resurrected,
get-me-outta-here song!
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that measures the thickness of bricks,
the density of cinder,
the weight of nails,
the length of boards,
the height of forever,
the depth of never,
the circumference of always that measures
the way you remember
or don’t, the panic, the pressure,
the pain, the mixture
of mortar and memory
that blocks the synapse,
the names, the street, the day, the why of what was said,
the when,
the details drenched in stress,
the hormones hammered, the constant
construction of cortisol,
stone by stone for weeks, for months, for years, for decades.
This is the brain that was built,
worry by worry, crisis by crisis, everything
not tumbling down
but up into this lonesome, loathsome
wailing wall that only the brave can chip, tip, knock,
dismantle, bombard, blast, decimate, eradicate, obliterate,
annihilate. Now.
Remember?

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