[strontium-90 exhibits biochemical behaviour similar to calcium,  
after entering the organism, it is deposited in to the bones and marrow.  
the remains become stored in blood and soft tissue.  
the body's absorption is involuntary and permanent. ]

[for katherine,  
the earth]

7 june 2012  
  
tomorrow, we go to chernobyl.  
  
i've become irritated and agitated the last few hours  
as the thought of actually going is overwhelming  
and it hasn't become any less worrying  
  
i've been more conscientious than ever with supplements,  
especially iodine.  
  
kiev is a mess and we got lost many times.  
our hotel is on an old cruise ship floating in the river.  
the balcony overlooks a steep bank and a park with a market.  
  
there are fireworks over the river tonight.  
  
my thoughts escape to romance. i have the most vivid images that flash for seconds,  
mute themselves to blocks of colour and lines  
then, they disappear.  
  
how can you erase only one memory? only a few?

*the weight of snow*в а г а   с н і г у

6 june 2012  
  
i am waiting on the tarmac at borispol. the landing was rough.  
  
we flew in to an oncoming storm cloud,  
i saw a bolt of lightning from one cloud to another, suspended in the air,  
right next to our wing.  
  
we've been stuck on this plane for two hours now  
waiting for the storm to pass  
  
my arrival in kyiv was startling. highways lined with tidily planted trees,  
tall fences that hide what lies behind.  
  
my driver's ring tone is cats meowing.  
  
we drive in to the city at the moment dusk turns. people crowd the streets, which are lined with a combination of haphazard markets and western-style stores. already i'm unable to stop myself from orientalizing this place, and am trying to keep it in check. my mind is consumed with communist horror stories.  
  
everyone is walking. everyone seems at peace.  
  
i am terrified.  
  
  
  
  
18 august 2011  
  
We are on our way to church  
None of us religious except for my grandmother  
My parents discuss house prices and macroeconomic policies  
I sit in back with my grandmother  
We drive past a fenced pasture, always empty  
  
She asks  
Have you seen any horses there?  
  
  
8 june 2012  
  
geiger counter reading: 11 micro roentgens per hour  
  
this morning, i couldn't eat.  
  
we met our translator and our driver, we packed our cameras and microphones and went on our way. we went to chernobyl in a nissan sentra.  
  
our translator talks about the bridge, still under construction, billions over budget. actual construction cost? less than half of what was spent so far. where do you think the rest goes?  
  
minutes out of the city we're stopped by police. the driver rolls his window down, and slips the officer a bill. we're on our way. "that's how it works in ukraine", he says  
  
i'm struck by the countryside, how there's little difference than what i know at home.  Our driver has made a mix cd: the knife plays, then tracy chapman. mark has to tell the driver that tracy chapman is, in fact, a woman. i claim it as the highlight of the day. we talk about video games.  
  
The question strikes me: why would anyone take this as a job?  
  
as we approach checkpoint one, i begin to decompress slightly. i had expected a soviet military experience, and got an informal, comfortable, flexible journey.  
  
checkpoint one: 12 micro roentgens per hour  
  
we enter the exclusion zone.  
  
  
  
28 september 2011  
  
I overhear my mother and aunt  
I found three bars of ivory soap in her clothing she says  
And more in her bag  
  
It’s for the cancer she explains  
She places the bars close to her body  
Where the cancer is  
  
A cure  
  
She becomes more religious  
Understandable  
I'm reminded of Daniel and his lion  
My lion  
carrying on as you would  
And knowing you're going to die

8 june 2012  
  
geiger counter reading: 17 micro roentgens per hour  
  
we have seen the first glimpse of the chimney of reactor 4.  
  
our translator and escort explains there is no such thing as normal when it comes to background radiation.  
  
it is akin to normal climate  
normal rainfall  
normal temperature.  
  
we pass a dry storage facility, cement factory, and the new containment structure, barely under construction. no photos allowed.  
  
we reach a cooling tower. geiger counter reading: 81, 83, 77  
when we reach the abandoned city, 71  
  
in front of the pripyat sign, we took some photos  
and drove through the beautiful forest city  
the shocking part became clear how organized austerity had given way to cottage country.  
  
we see evidence of sneaking in, drinking in the zone  
i think i see a condom wrapper but it isn't  
and there my mind goes again  
thinking of romance  
  
  
  
  
7 december 2011  
  
days before her birthday her body is donated, as her wishes dictate  
to science  
we are told that we will receive notice when her ashes are ready to be collected,  
a rough estimation is one year.  
  
during her wake, my head buried in chernobyl, i toast to her  
her entire life she was against the evils of alcohol  
and now we are raising a glass in her honour  
her mountains of photos  
her plastic figurines  
her carefully preserved and decade old cookies  
as though this mere act of gathering transfers her physical presence  
in to memory  
  
  
8 june 2012  
  
after the brief and horrifying alarm of the geiger counter while we passed the red forest  
we have arrived at the reactor, but before we go we have lunch.  
  
the cafeteria is beside the sarcophagus  
separated by an access road  
no filming is allowed  
  
i somehow can't find my appetite  
we grab extra bread for feeding catfish as large as me  
  
before we exit and enter every checkpoint and every building  
we have a radiation screening.  
  
each time, i pray that nothing is contaminated,  
that nothing happens  
that we can go on our way  
  
in front of the reactor building, geiger counter reading fluctuates. 200, 300, 400  
i refuse to get out. i want a photo, some footage, and we can leave.  
  
we get stopped by an officer.  
  
an eternity passes.  
  
  
  
  
8 march 2013  
  
half year / half life since chernobyl  
and an eruption  
  
i became very conscious of the object growing from my skin  
at the time my sister became very conscious of those underneath hers  
  
every day my devotion has become as a leper  
rise, wash, cover, hope for healing  
eventually i would feel him cut through my skin  
taking away piece by piece as i felt every move  
it revealed a small, disappointing wound for my trouble  
now held together by string  
  
my grandmother was a devout christian her entire life  
never marking her body  
when she was irradiated  
her skin was tattooed  
as a map to guide the isotopes to heal  
did she make peace with leviticus?  
  
i keep thinking of the babushka we saw in chernobyl  
and how she said there was no one else, she was the only one  
she blessed us  
wished us well  
and walked off, stopping only to cross herself at a roadside icon  
  
as we drive off,  
  
wild horses  
  
  
  
  
11 june 2012  
  
after a few days i evaluate my memory  
i recall seeing only one bird in our entire time in the zone  
i recall the fairgrounds, the town square  
the feeling  
the wind  
i recall everything as vivid as i was there  
  
i recall measured points where helicopters landed, spray painted spots  
on asphalt  
invisible threats  
i wonder how i would feel if i could see  
every atom that threatens  
like a pack of lions in a den  
which i threw myself in to  
  
tonight we dined on red olives and white beer  
which was named after a white lion  
  
tomorrow we will eat boxed sandwiches  
mail our postcards  
and land in oslo  
and everything will be a memory

14 february 2013  
  
somehow, last night as i was falling asleep i had the most lurid vision of kiev. it was warm, a soft breeze flowing through the streets. we were walking from the biennale to soviet monuments and back to the city. then, the markets. then, the river.  
  
it was an animal memory, sentient or not  
as though my body remembers water and is drawn  
forgetting consequence  
  
my body was again filled with electricity; i sat up, breathing heavily. it took me another hour to get to sleep.  
  
it's valentine's day. this morning, buried at the back of the newspaper i read that the roof collapsed over the reactor, under the weight of snow.  
  
i haven't seen the sun for three days.  
  
  
  
  
*[credit roll over black, audio is my grandmother's voice recorded through the baby monitor my parents used for me, while she talks to a volunteer from a senior's centre about her life]*