

**Author's comment:** *Every year on Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur I am once again moved by the prayer-poem (piyyut) known as Unitaneh Kotef. It begins: On Rosh Hashonah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed . . . and goes on: who shall live and who shall die . . . However, the lines that speak most personally and profoundly to me are those that read: (It is written) who shall be secure and who shall be driven; who shall be tranquil and who shall be troubled . . . We may constrain our more destructive urges and nurture our positive impulses, but in the end, we are who we are, some of us secure, some driven, some tranquil and some troubled. The Unitaneh Kotef, with its rich understanding of, and compassion for, the human condition has informed my poem and given it its title, It is Written. . . . Rhoda Rabinowitz Green*

## It is Written

*Who shall be tranquil . . . who shall be  
troubled . . .*

“Your mother went peaceably in the night,”  
I heard her say over the phone.

How’s that?  
Neither living nor leaving was ever serene  
my quiet caller surely must mean:  
to everything there is a season.

“You’ll want to view her remains,” she presumed.  
I don’t know, why would I?  
Why would anyone?  
She is after all, dead  
and the dead don’t care who is there.

3 a.m. my body aches  
to rest  
sleep.

When the sun has risen;  
after brushing teeth and hair,  
after coffee  
will be time enough.

In darkened room I see she's gone where I can't follow.  
Died from fright, at least it seems,  
stunned into silence  
dumbed mid-thought  
freeze-framed  
Polaroid.

Eyelids shuttered,  
slitted gaze devoid of sight  
stares down at  
nothing

Her mouth an open silent scream  
black saliva caught midstream:  
congealed threads string parted lips.

Jaundiced, her skin lies stretched  
deprived of movement  
deprived of breath  
Botoxed

Before death shocked she lay comatose  
body frail, legs and feet small intrusions  
beneath the sheet.  
Trembling hands rattled padded rail  
tore at gown and chest, then came to rest  
but not for long.

Arms floated, hovered there  
spread-winged seraph soared through air,  
gliding downward  
up again, again again  
searching for a calmer realm.

A rolled towel supports her neck  
I suppose to keep the head in place  
a blessing, should I unwittingly disturb the space  
as fingers stroke her hardened hair —  
matted, stiff, the scalp shows through;  
caress her brow, then draw back  
bewildered.

Indifferent, ungiving touch.

Stone Angel

She died at last  
organs intact, heart still strong  
consequence of her life-long habit of walking;  
walking the malls —  
alone  
she used to say.

She died, at last.  
No food, no water  
starvation and thirst  
her choice  
nothing in, nothing out.

Sweet cloying smell of death  
replaced with talc;  
yellow pallor disguised with powder:  
instant health achieved with cosmetic.

They've given her a prostitute's blush  
slashed her eyebrows angry-brown  
rouged her lips harsh blood-red

This is what happens once you're dead.

Someone's coiffed her head of white  
curled it, fluffed it, sprayed it, splayed it  
against the satin; plumped her cheeks —  
How? With cotton?

Porcelain painted doll.

No sign of life  
None of the struggle  
preserved.

There was one sign:  
purple-black bruises tattooing her arms  
exposed by the short-sleeved dress she had on.  
One that I chose.  
What was I thinking?  
They said:  
“Bring her clothes like she’s dressed for a party.”  
Brazen denial  
Grand illusion

I do not know this manikin.