

Melinda Thomsen

New York Blood Center

A man is already hooked up
and draining his pint. His tee shirt
says, *Got blood?* I have blood
and tonight my hemoglobin
indicates enough to share.

A math teacher is across
from me and a young woman
with strawberry blond hair
reclines next to him.

The Hasidic Jew beside me
wears a hat and strings
hang below his jacket
and we are all parked,
idling in this reverse
gas station. The attendant
leans over and remarks,
*Honey, You're a fast bleeder
be careful going home.*

Now, I know to inform medics,
if I'm hit by a taxi turning
onto Second at 79th Street
and the idea of a tourniquet
has never been so appealing.

The puce liquid is siphoned,
labeled and placed in a tray
like rows of gills. Next,
we're cotton-swabbed and taped up
with neon orange bandages
and directed to the raisons.

On my napkin, they've printed
different donor levels. Why
am I tempted by membership
in their Gallon Club?

A friend objects, *You already
give blood teaching every night.*

True. It is more counting
paper cuts or stiff new shoes.

But, explain the man,
after walking uptown
from the Trade Center, his suit

covered in ash, who made a left onto
77th Street to Lennox Hill Hospital
to get in line, repeating,
I have to give blood
and his disappointment
when they refused him saying,
Sit down. Let us care for you.
Explain our resentment
when they started asking
for only Type O.
Explain this need
to give of our bodies
to strangers to pour it all out
just to be helpful.
Explain this mixing
of us all up and none
able to accept our offers.
Explain our sadness
when they gave us water
because no ambulances had arrived
and it was already past noon.

Remembering a Letter My Grandfather Wrote About Standing Outside Buchenwald
Crematorium on April 23, 1945

On Wednesday, the winds shifted.
Eighty blocks away while walking
to the river, I covered my mouth
with a cloth against the dust
that clouded my neighborhood

and shimmered white in the sun.
But what was I filtering out? Air
mixed with pulverized concrete,
molten metal, airplane fuel, plastics,
glass, paint, fabrics, letters, files,

office furniture, photographs or bone?
More and more notices appeared on street
signs and mailboxes like a flurry of moths
that begot moths flickering names, eye color,
height, weight and family phone numbers,

putting names to those that we breathed.

