

# OCCCLUSION

Alexandra Nowakowski, PhD

Departments of Geriatrics and Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine

People stare at the sky  
one day every 40 years  
and try not to get burned.  
I remember when every day  
was that same fight—  
anything to avoid looking  
directly.  
Darkness edged in light.

My shadow split in two,  
vibrating on broken ground  
and the loose soil of trails  
that I ran down, breathless.  
When the light died  
I scrubbed at dirt  
packed deep in wounds.

For years there was no blood,  
and then  
everything  
shattered.  
Rays refracted on  
broken glass, obscuring  
which way might be up.

Teeth set against each other  
like splintered mirrors,  
like decaying papers,  
things that crumble into dust.  
I washed away the soil;  
more surfaced on my skin.

I died in the small spaces  
between memories and fears  
over and over.  
A player in a game  
with no rulebook, or without one  
for me.  
When the light died  
I would not shut my eyes  
lest the edges of my shadows—  
those shaking ashes—  
creep back in.

But some wounds  
cannot stay closed, and so  
I became riddled with dust,  
with glass,  
with broken embers.  
I burned  
to cinders.

I am still finding  
what remains.  
Staring directly into fear  
gives those shadows  
fierce teeth,  
the better me to rend.  
I rip them from their sockets  
as my own disintegrate,  
as I hold others in my hand.

Words on my tongue  
taste only of rubble.  
I have been wrecked  
and risen up,  
climbing over shards  
of splintered glass,  
grasping at hot coals.  
Feeling around in darkness  
for the edges  
of light that once shone.

I fear I am all sharpness now,  
all corners.  
Even broken clocks  
are correct once or twice, and I  
no longer know where days  
begin and end.  
I shut my eyes, douse myself  
in driving rains that come  
every afternoon.

I gasp for breath,  
water running sideways.  
I bite my lip; I bleed.  
When darkness falls,  
my shadows come together.  
Sometimes I can even bear  
to look.

A pile of broken things:  
mirrors, molars, me.  
I am rebuilt  
piece by piece.  
I am a freeway  
8 years under construction  
but maybe more,  
a building never finished,  
a monument in ruins.  
I was always coming down.

Some of those black moments  
faded like burns  
on the surface of fabric.  
Others singed clean through.  
I fight my way back with needles,  
stitching at shadows,  
cutting at dusk.

One day I will hold things  
in hand without them slipping  
through the burned spaces,  
the empty stretches,  
the gaps in me.  
Corporeality bites, but I am still  
here, and two shadows  
can come from single objects  
still somehow, impossibly,  
intact.