

## Dara Weinberg

### CHECKING OUT

I turn off the Xerox machine and the fax and the other fax  
and the PC tower and the fluorescents,  
put the check register in the desk, lock the desk,  
and take the elevator eleven floors down  
to the narrow front of East 21st Street.

When I come out, the space between the buildings  
is so thin it's an upside-down skyscraper of sky,  
narrower at the street. There will be no sky at all  
for the next two hours of trains back to Brooklyn.  
Someone once told me I should come to New York, so I did.

Two trains and three stations later, and a walk  
past a housing project like a cliff made of bricks—  
I am back in my windowless basement room  
with the tile floor, staring at the square grate  
in the middle, wondering what the drain was for.

I eat the same sandwich I eat every night.  
A car alarm punctuates the seconds of the dark,  
as if to say how few hours of single-malt sleep  
stand between me and tomorrow's trains.  
Someone once told me I should come to New York,

so I did. Tomorrow I will try to buy food  
for a different kind of sandwich and it will not go well—  
I will see the word *California* on a bag of mandarin oranges  
and start crying in the narrow aisles of the supermarket—  
and a man with a cart full of cat food will ask me to move, please,

he is trying to get to the checkout. Where I come from,  
I want to tell him, they make the grocery stores  
big enough for someone to cry in the produce section  
and someone else to move around them.  
And when you get to the parking lot

you put your oranges in a car, not a backpack,  
and you drive the car home, and you park the car  
in a driveway above ground, never under,  
and you eat the whole bag of mandarin oranges  
at a kitchen table bigger than Brooklyn.