

## MyProteins

Jane Hirshfield, 1953

They have discovered, they say,  
the protein of itch—  
natriuretic polypeptide b—  
and that it travels its own distinct pathway  
inside my spine.  
As do pain, pleasure, and heat.

A body it seems is a highway,  
a cloverleaf crossing  
well built, well traversed.  
Some of me going north, some going south.

Ninety percent of my cells, they have discovered,  
are not my own person,  
they are other beings inside me.

As ninety-six percent of my life is not my life.

Yet I, they say, am they—  
my bacteria and yeasts,  
my father and mother,  
grandparents, lovers,  
my drivers talking on cell phones,  
my subways and bridges,  
my thieves, my police  
who chase my self night and day.

My proteins, apparently also me,  
fold the shirts.

I find in this crowded metropolis  
a quiet corner,  
where I build of not-me Lego blocks  
a bench,  
pigeons, a sandwich  
of rye bread, mustard, and cheese.

It is me and is not,  
the hunger  
that makes the sandwich good.

It is not me then is,  
the sandwich—  
a mystery neither of us  
can fold, unfold, or consume.

**Try reading the poem out loud.**

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS POEM – ASK YOUR OWN TOO!**

1. What do you think the poet wants to say? How does she 'tell it slant'?
2. This is written in free verse, but if you speak it out, you can hear some rhymes or near-rhymes. How do they help the poem?
3. What is vivid about the piece? What details make an impact?
4. Body and city – how does this metaphor work? What does it add?