



# Mean Free Path

*Ben Lerner*

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**Mean Free Path** Ben Lerner

“Lerner [is] among the most promising young poets now writing.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“Sharp, ambitious, and impressive.” —*Boston Review*

National Book Award finalist Ben Lerner turns to science once again for his guiding metaphor. “Mean free path” is the average distance a particle travels before colliding with another particle. The poems in Lerner’s third collection are full of layered collisions—repetitions, fragmentations, stutters, re-combinations—that track how language threatens to break up or change course under the emotional pressures of the utterance. And then there’s the larger collision of love, and while Lerner questions whether love poems are even possible, he composes a gorgeous, symphonic, and complicated one.

*You startled me. I thought you were sleeping  
In the traditional sense. I like looking  
At anything under glass, especially  
Glass. You called me. Like overheard  
Dreams. I’m writing this one as a woman  
Comfortable with failure. I promise I will never  
But the predicate withered. If you are  
Uncomfortable seeing this as portraiture  
Close your eyes. No, you startled*

**Ben Lerner** is the author of three books of poetry and was named a finalist for the National Book Award for his second book, *Angle of Yaw*. He holds degrees from Brown University, co-founded *No: a journal of the arts*, and teaches at the University of Pittsburgh.

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