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## No Fine End for a Modern Day Alice in Transit

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*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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NO FINE END FOR A MODERN DAY ALICE IN TRANSIT

by

Lisa Brooks Markowitz

Bachelor of Arts-English  
California State University, Long Beach  
Long Beach, California  
2002

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing  
Department of English  
College of Liberal Arts**

**Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
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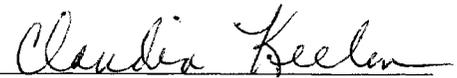
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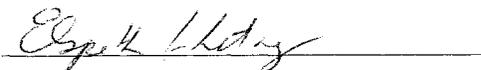
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ABSTRACT

**No Fine End For A Modern Day Alice In Transit**

by

Lisa Markowitz

Claudia Keelan, Examination Committee Chair  
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To the reader—

How I live is a giant writing thing, even when I'm not writing. There is always breath, both shallow and deep, and somewhere, wet jackets, sides of the same world. It is about the blob, mostly because all of this has been written and said but for the ghost that follows me around. What matters most finds us when we are open, the way a flower opens up for the sun. I write because I don't have a choice, the way Alice had to go through Wonderland before she could get out. What is left, having left Wonderland? But, wonder of course. Here is absolute necessity because 'Writing, I feel, is an art, and artists, I feel, are human beings' (e.e. Cummings). The blob, you see. Simultaneously, a giant sphere, all parts working at once. Nothing is fully separate. Don't believe me? Neither do the bugs. Life is very serious, and strange, and funny. Go ask Alice. Because guess what, the bugs don't believe her either.

Let my truth be your truth, and then change it somewhere in the process, wherever you see fit. Things lie deeply wedged in the world, and none of me knows quite

what the world is, just that it is. Just as you must be true, I have given myself to the world that wants me (as there are more than one when you take into account the wetness of imagination), because if I don't, then what's this life anyway? What's this world? Peter Gabriel says, 'If you don't get given you learn to take, and I will take you.' You ought to say this, too. 'Tis better to be given over to something than to force myself into a mold because I want to fit somewhere amongst the made constructions that hold life together. I am only what I am in this poetry. It is about many things, this book.

As a child, more of life is whole, like the blob in all its fullness, and as a child I am wholly immersed in the grass, with my giant house in Texas, the one with turrets (the castle house). Thoughts are feelings and feelings are thoughts, a blob of immediate experience. Now I see my inner and outer worlds as two separate universes, as a supposed 'grown up', but they are still one in little bits of no real world (other than mine, that is). It is me that has changed, not so much the world. The kid reminds me. My body and my spirit are separate but together, and I need both. I need words in my cells, but I don't know it. Still, something in the air tells me. When I trekked through the mountains of Laterbrunnen, when I found myself in the middle of a new landscape, completely foreign and awe striking, the life and landscape inside me changed. If I am changed from all of these real illusions, then so are you, because the life I imagine will make the world other people see. We are more powerful than we think we are. The children still living in us know the truth about everything, because everything is new to a child. We choose not to listen. An immediate, visceral experience with the world is what I want, but my thoughts have somehow caused me to think my imagination and what happens in the outside world are separate. They are the same. What defies time is the imagination;

transcendence, the way children play. They play with time. And there is no one way of looking at a thing. There is the thing, but without my perception of it, where is it, and what is it, and how can anyone know?

This is the moment when language is born. Now. Pay close attention. The sky is vast with possibility, in the air, in its chemical make up, in the weather in the rain, in gaseous clouds, in birds, in the wet life of things, in every inch of it touching something, but covering every bit of earth and then some, into the fourth dimension I will go if I can let go of words as representation and realize that their true power is in me already and in things already, The gap can be closed through poetry, but only when I come to it and let it consume me, not see the sky word and then the sky thing, but to see both as one, the oneness of human experience why poetry is so. 'In my life the furniture eats me.' And so it does, William Carlos Williams. Sometimes the furniture eats me as well. It's a nasty reality, but surely even this can be beautiful, when given over to the right hands. Yes, because here—in a moment true—I wish to be faithful. These moments are becoming rarer and rarer as I grow. Without imagination, there is no world. There is only a big empty. What experience creates all on which my senses feed, and there is nothing outside of my perception of it. The bugs say there is, but how would I know? I must make myself, always be in that house of being, always be being, and stop focusing on what I have to get done. I must come out of that house cummings warns us about. Stop with all this doing, he says. Besides, it never gets done anyway. The bugs don't know this because they don't have the capacity for awareness. They just are, and they be as they were meant to, surely.

Most of us have life completely backwards. This is the great looking glass, this is the way I get back to reality—in accepting that there isn't one. My reality exists as long as I exist in the world, and this is the only way I can know anything. It is just fine and dandy to question everything. No one knows where in the puzzle they go. My being forms and forms through my un-grasp of what I think the world is. Then everything moves like lovely. 'To enter a new world, and have there freedom of movement and newness'— WCW.

'If anything of moment results—so much the better.' This is being in the present, the indefinable, immeasurable moment to moment leaving us even now. And with imagination, we not only move through a great big Composition Field where I will run like Alice, passing by Charles Olson and giving a quick head nod to say, yes, yes, you mattered very much. We are hammering out truth, moment to moment, leaving us now, and also, we are adding to it. Truth is in the thing itself, but how do I see the thing but through me, through my ghost, with a little bit of color?

You see, language is wholly insufficient, so much that the only way to move past it is to rearrange it and to play! Out with it, poet. Mix it up to the point of dissociation, to the point of absolute drawing in of the senses by sound, emotions, by uttering syllables and rearranging themes, rearranging everything because things aren't so black and white, but they aren't always gray. They are unblack and unwhite and ungray, somewhere else existing in a new world, because it already exists somewhere else. As poets, we don't rebel really, not as much as we seek the truth, whether that be the popular view of the day or the opposite, or bliss, but we look for our own. It takes time to become. It is neither reaction nor pro-action.

Nonsense, you say? The bugs find it okay. There is no common sense, and if there is, by God is it common. Who needs it? Thoreau certainly doesn't, and how I admire him and his dear friend. 'How monstrous and how feeble seems some unworld which would rather have its too than eat its cake!' (e.e. Cummings) I take his idea of Spring throughout, I am always beginning, to show the place in which I reside, which is where I am, where I write, and where the poet ought to be. This is the gap, and in it is a constant Spring, a constant movement of forward motion, both physically as well as spiritually, through beginning, but not at the beginning. I can only hope my life will be a constant beginning in which I begin over and over, in the literary gap. Spring is the sun that comes after rain—a traumatic downpour (which is always better than an unrain, a half pour a drizzle). Most experiences are untraumatic, and I do not find this comforting in the least. Because give me a bug and I'll give you some sense, but surely it won't make any.

Read fully as I write fully, be traumatic and let us create a third person, because to live a half-life unknowingly is to say you have a responsibility to the world or the flowers, sun or sky, but that is what makes us human.

To be awake—

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| ABSTRACT.....  | iii |
| SOME WONDERLAND.....   | 1   |
| What Wonderland Is .....                                       | 2   |
| The No-Name King.....  | 4   |
| Birthday Eight.....  | 6   |
| Alice Takes To The Road Part 1: A Church.....                  | 8   |
| Idiot Bee .....  | 10  |
| Alice Takes To The Road Part 2: A Local Bar In Las Vegas ..... | 12  |
| In Transit .....   | 14  |
| Alice Talks To The Faucet .....                                | 15  |
| The Princess Of Curdled Milk.....                              | 16  |
| Alice Leaves The Page.....                                     | 17  |
| To My Severed Finger (01/28/05) .....                          | 18  |
| Swansea.....   | 20  |
| Alice Rethinks Herself .....                                   | 21  |
| The Dangers Of Thinking.....                                   | 23  |
| Tattoos In Spring .....  | 26  |
| Some Wonderland.....   | 28  |
| THE KID WE STILL ARE.....                                      | 29  |
| Football Head Part 2 .....                                     | 31  |
| Talent Show.....   | 32  |
| Dance Of The Paintball Park.....                               | 33  |
| The Boy Who Had A Seizure .....                                | 35  |
| Trash Bags.....  | 36  |
| On Being A Camp Counselor For Very Rich Girls.....             | 37  |
| The Kid We Still Are .....                                     | 39  |
| WHERE THE WORDS BE .....                                       | 41  |
| From A Bud.....  | 42  |
| Chrysalis.....   | 43  |
| Rest.....  | 44  |
| Confessions From A Poet Coma.....                              | 45  |
| Photo Opp.....   | 47  |
| In The Laundry Room.....                                       | 48  |
| From A Wall.....   | 49  |
| Through A Blinded Window.....                                  | 50  |
| The Sky Talks To Me About My Next Birthday.....                | 51  |
| To The Flag .....  | 52  |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Traffic Feels Like.....                 | 53  |
| Cairngorm Dream .....                   | 55  |
| Notes From the Underground.....         | 56  |
| Word Court.....                         | 58  |
| The Quarterly Clam .....                | 60  |
| Where the Words Be .....                | 61  |
| <br>                                    |     |
| GOD COMES OUT OF A GLOVE .....          | 63  |
| Abba .....                              | 64  |
| Looking For Winter .....                | 65  |
| God In Winter.....                      | 66  |
| Creep .....                             | 67  |
| Spirit.....                             | 68  |
| Church and Poetry.....                  | 69  |
| Two Short Poems On Perspective .....    | 71  |
| Lost.....                               | 72  |
| Days Of 2003.....                       | 73  |
| Reconversion .....                      | 74  |
| Days of 2004.....                       | 75  |
| After Alice.....                        | 76  |
| Days Of 2004 Part 2.....                | 78  |
| Winter In Him.....                      | 79  |
| God Comes Out Of A Glove .....          | 80  |
| <br>                                    |     |
| BETWEEN SPEAK.....                      | 82  |
| Kick .....                              | 83  |
| Dance Of The Paintball Park Part 2..... | 84  |
| Third Love.....                         | 85  |
| Dreaming Is A Fish (Dive).....          | 86  |
| Turn.....                               | 87  |
| Talk of the Wire.....                   | 88  |
| Recovery.....                           | 89  |
| The Go-Go Dancer Watches Me .....       | 90  |
| Cut.....                                | 91  |
| Nightlight Hallucination.....           | 92  |
| Air Thoughts.....                       | 93  |
| Air Thoughts Part 2.....                | 95  |
| To The Angry Boys.....                  | 97  |
| Ditching Dance In Winter .....          | 99  |
| Personal Revival .....                  | 100 |
| Between Speak.....                      | 102 |
| <br>                                    |     |
| VITA .....                              | 104 |

SOME WONDERLAND

*In a Wonderland they lie,  
Dreaming as the days go by,  
Dreaming as the summers die.  
'Ever drifting down the stream—  
Lingering hi the golden gleam—  
Life, what is it but a dream?  
Lewis Carroll*

What Wonderland Is

*Before beauty disappears entirely from the earth, it will go on existing for awhile by mistake.*

*Milan Kundera*

I  
Mental trees being  
In the dark, stemmed out  
They are my arms  
My baby body wrapped with covers,  
The *Cuckoo Cocoon*—

*Some sort of Jonah trapped up  
Inside a whale*

Where I fall  
Into the cannon, a deep likeness  
Of words and what the goblin wants to say—  
I walk into the world full of junk,  
How junk is a blessing.

II  
Dressing up  
When life is dirty,  
Elbows soaked in mental mud,  
An entire being worked  
Because I can't relax unless life  
Is hard and unexpected  
Each second in this great improvisation.  
Shakespeare was right;  
It is a stage.

All of this.

The goblin agrees  
To send me—

I awaken in the Looking Glass.  
The grass grows backwards  
And I talk with deep soulful barks  
While the dogs talk with dirty cat meows  
In dumpsters.

III  
A rumble over the lake, electric  
Pink lightning in the sky.

I sat at a café drinking cappuccino, sure  
It must have been the end of the world,  
Sure it must have been Jesus come back.  
It comes out unexpected and I don't want it,  
So much poetry it crowds my lines.  
I wonder how small is his welcoming mat

IV  
What Wonderland is.

The No-Name King

*Poetry is the art of creating imaginary gardens with real toads.*

*Marianne Moore*

I am the No-Name Queen—a silent dance, a sun girl standing  
In lightness, a thick bright cold an opening a new world.  
My rainwet hands cup and bowl, inchworms hide

Between my fingers. They are small and dry,  
The only life I've found for miles.  
If he sees them, they will die.

Rain walks (pit and pat), drops of water under rubber.  
Chimes of the day-sky (birds squawk, church bells tip and tap)  
Blend my soul and shoe, opening his soul and boot.

He leads me down a narrow path,  
The names I know I've heard, somewhere—this, that  
The other way. Tip and tap I toe the day

Leaving rocky marks for the next lonely traveler.  
The way is etched in wet petals, pine needles  
And misunderstood stones; we are three steps apart.

I cannot help but bend to touch the nature things  
As we walk. I am slight and quiet, I dance—  
Tip and tap on pavement, tip and tap this man.

The sun spurts words on trees, what's been said.  
Leaves turn crimson, gold; they fall sideways through the air—  
It ominous and I am thinking.

I look forward to a nervous attack of the veins.  
The king says *forever*—I cannot but rest,  
My body heavier now. The king says *oh this rain*.

In these woods the trees stretch into a haze,  
The way they arch their necks,  
The way the branches arabesque, a ballet-rainbow,

Because there is no bow today, only worm and rain.  
I cannot but walk, waiting for a language I may never understand.  
I hold tightly to the worms, feet to pat the ground, someone to hold me

In his hands. I feel the weight of little bodies growing up  
In sun and rain, inching out the corners of my fists. Freedom.

Even I cannot keep them, not like this.

What can No-Names do but what they can? Leave a little space,  
A forest empty red and green, in nameless puddles I will leave my plan.  
For now I tip and tap on pavement, tip and tap this man.

## Birthday Eight

I find her when I fall,  
A bike accident one week  
Before my eighth birthday.  
The sun is neon, we are exactly  
The same age.

I am America, nearly dead  
On a curb. She is England,  
Plopping on thick mud-plugged mushrooms—  
Says she's given up  
Looking for a rabbit.  
She wants to heal me, watch the world  
As it blends.  
Maybe it's all building,  
A hospital.

The doctor tells me I've ruptured  
My spleen, eight years brought to a halt  
With a sentence.

Alice sits on the end  
Of my astronaut bed  
That rises with a switch.  
She is two inches high  
And scared for my life.  
I hang from tubes and needles,  
Still a girl no less. Not imagined, but real.  
Not blonde but brunette. Not British,  
But broken.

My IV leaks, makes weather.  
Then comes water.  
It stops raining after eight days,  
Fresh wet road outside a frame of window.  
Sun again, sky rips in half.  
The doctor gives me ice cream  
To celebrate leaving the ICU.

It molds my mouth, a library,  
The smell of books I read.  
Vanilla, processed peanut butter chunks,  
Paragraphs and Alice—  
A girl who really makes  
Things move.

We talk about poetry.

Nobody knows what it is  
Or what it does.  
That's where it gets me, still a kid.  
I trust everything: the cure, the doctor,  
All sharp things that make me better,  
Make me nearly new.  
Alice asks, but Lisa, what does the spleen really do?

I'm not sure, but funny I know  
How it feels when it bursts, spilling over  
Other organs with blood.  
We talk about living—  
Sometimes cells mount words,  
Come before.  
I can't be a poet with a broken body,  
But they keep coming back.

Words swirl around us, say strange things—  
England glows green.  
The moon is clisping.  
Strawberry grass grows up to the stars.  
You need a new word, she says, for what you do.

Call it little epiphany, call it a lime,  
A new religion,  
A short attention span.  
It isn't words  
It isn't life.

It's something else.  
Can't you see what you're doing,  
Looking out in a big cliché—

Forests of trees without leaves  
On a bitter afternoon,  
Your body sucked of blood,  
Narrowing  
For clarity?

Alice Takes To The Road Part 1: A Church

*If you don't know where you are going...*

*Lewis Carroll*

Cool sunny Sunday, sky is brighter than normal.  
A small white car climbs concrete  
New England hills  
Puttering, choppy like a toy.

And there they stand—now realized trees,  
Thin branches with pretty white leaves.

Alice is the cheeky blonde girl  
Driving the car, her hair pulled back,  
In search of another fall  
And she's aging with us.

You are the fly nestling in her head.  
You sing a merry tune  
Until she sweeps you off again.  
Muffled music spits from speakers  
But you can't make out a note  
And this maddens you.

A church approaches  
With the wheels of an '84 Rabbit, white,  
Naturally. Something compels her to park,  
All the wilting while tall trees, now realized,  
Laugh at the sky.  
You love the soundtracks  
Of other people's lives.

Inside is mostly empty, but for a short familiar king.  
His crown tilts the floor. He whispers  
Hushlike, a small echo in the walls.  
You are certain he's singing *Black Water*—  
Alice gathers he is lost in prayer.

A big-headed woman stands on stage  
With a microphone, voice like a beautiful bright bird.  
She hums *How Great Thou Art*  
With her eyes closed—  
No one can hear it but her.  
A cone of ginger sun seeps  
Through stained glass windows,  
Lies on an old brown book.

It says, READ ME.

Alice thinks, I'll stay here, so long as I'm afraid  
And I'll read you, so long as you say  
Something valuable.  
She opens the book—it spouts  
Music inaudible,  
A soundless plant  
Then a few yellow flowers,  
A bass clef,  
Notes on bars.

How's that, she thinks. More and more  
Sound I can't hear,  
Only the music  
Of other's adventures.

Kings and things, queens whatever.

Which way do I go, is this all there is,  
Would anyone notice if I took a cookie and some coffee  
From the table in the corner?  
She says, *I'm just so tired.*

So many ghosts move through her.  
The king thinks, no, nobody would mind.  
So she munches for a while; everyone needs to eat.

What a strange scene, she thinks,  
What a strange way it is  
I can't forget the one great thing I only was,  
And just enjoy the trip.

## Idiot Bee

The lone bee scrunched in my keyboard  
Sounds a screech every time I type a word; knock

Knock stop him (in between wake and this seam  
Sleep come apart and going wrong)

In thoughts I hear them whirl: He's going  
He's going to get this girl.

Winds blow, blotting my window  
In neon pink bulbs, he escapes

Through *esc.*, gets caught in my hair.  
The idiot bee is crumbling everywhere.

His feet are in my lashes, guts and all  
His idiot parts: stinger wedged in pockets,

Stripes painting borders on the walls.  
His eyes are my earrings, twig snap

Claws arrange themselves into a phrase:  
Nothing like the sun. Is that Shakespeare

Or Sting? In the middle of the night now  
Little veins reconvene (when I'm not

Awake). Morning comes with dew on grass blades,  
Pick up trucks park in my complex,

Working men perched on the edge  
Like loud Mexican birds. Their idiot laughs

Remind me of the bumbling bee, out to get me,  
All better as if someone in the night snuck in

And put him back together.  
He climbs atop my printer;

A miniscule microphone emerges  
And he taps it test, one two.  
Now he's singing *Message in A Bottle*  
With a tweepey bee voice. *Just a castaway*—

Cast this. I throw my sneaker in a fit of madness  
But all it kills is my printer, so much I can't print  
This. Sadness.

But if it's such a little bee,  
A baby bee at all, fear takes shape in life and life  
Will never leave me in something so small.

Alice Takes To The Road Part 2: A Local Bar In Las Vegas

*...any road will take you there.*

*Lewis Carroll*

The bartender is a middle-aged woman  
With bushy blonde hair and big lips.  
Sad cloud covers her eyes,  
They are oceans—a daughter, a dancer.

Many pills run her blood,  
Make life droopy.  
She stumbles toward Alice, her mouth crunches,  
Forehead lifts—unsexy, more confused  
Than the customers.

She calls Alice sweetheart, growth at this moment arrested,  
The way they manipulate each other's faces.

One of the locals has a pointy nose,  
Taps his leg and tells Alice  
Just last night he was sweating  
In a hospital bed, praying for his broken pancreas

While she sips cheap white wine, wonders  
Where she'll be in five years.

If he drinks again, he'll die, he says.  
And tomorrow he'll be here, chewing on endless bags of sour candy.  
There's some death too, not black but indifferent, waiting so patiently  
For his skinny arms to stop.

His old girlfriend (very young and blonde and French) rests  
Her ear in the armpit of another man, long-haired, dirty and loud  
(Likes to stick his tongue out) (likes to yell) (likes to push words).

Alice wishes hard for someone with a soft voice  
To read them all a story without weight  
Without symbols or meaning—  
A story of living  
As living is  
And painted in their drinks—  
Bloody and black, sparkling off white  
And yellow brown, melting  
Like a first good acid trip  
Before they collected their own worn symbols  
And silly syllogisms.

The story is a sunny afternoon  
When there's a buzz about the world,  
Birds drunk with singing,  
Trees clean and sky clear,  
All the world many shelves of books

## In Transit

She pulls the blue dress over her head,  
Braces her body to climb through a mirror.  
It looks her over, withered, the mirror the girl  
Gotten older. The hole is jagged and glass;  
She barely fits. Shards trickle blood just a little,  
White apron rips. In between this place and that  
She stakes her name on a road lined with elderberries.

The sky is dizzy. It catches her hands,  
Turns them puppet. She marionettes  
Down a sandway, scoops a pile of teeth  
From under a tree because someone lets  
Those lovely hands move,  
Looks up, then  
Under, and there's cat bones  
Sunk in the mud.  
The sky moves, releases her.

Egg sizzles on hot concrete, leftover  
Puddles soak bowtie and belt. *Humpty*.  
Shell bits crunch under shoes, making tiny white  
Petals everywhere. A shell speck flits, folds in light,  
Lands on the shadow of a stranger.  
Alice squints hard and sees the Red Queen  
Penning pictures in the dirt with bare toes peaking  
From under a blood red gown.  
While the Red Queen walks,  
She runs numbers through her head,  
Clutches a tilted crown like royalty.

Alice melts fine, squeezes juice  
From elderberries making elderberry wine.  
Leaves like ghosts only rustle  
Some, only blow slightly. In between  
This place and that and this crumbled  
Summer she is stuck, browning in the sun.

## Alice Talks To The Faucet

*Mr. Faucet Man, surely I killed you the last time.*

He starts up again, real as real  
As this and Alice slips in a bit of water.

*Mr. Faucet Man, I've told you not to spit.*

He heaves a spot of chestnut sludge  
In the sink, it mixes with Comet-scrubs, green  
Watermarks; Q-tips go and  
Stop till it spews over the top.  
Over the top (a tap tap step),  
*He knows me so well.*  
Sigh.

She wakes up.  
Walls and ceiling squeak;  
The white from the window  
Smacks her upside the neck.  
She is sideways, sprawled like spilled make-up  
In a yellow bed.

The kitchen calls. Alice pours a cold glass  
Of liquid brown, color of a crayon.  
Oh my. The water has become  
Turkish coffee.

His voice goes *up with it, Alice.*  
He's enclosed in the bathroom sink,  
And there she just is, living through the motions.  
She thought he was dead (or at least a dream).

Nevertheless, Alice will digress to the bathroom  
Plush carpeted; smells like toilethead.  
Soapy stalactites hang from shower tile,  
Some stick out from the curtain  
Causing the blue fish to  
Flop.

*Mr. Faucet Man, are you ever gonna to stop?*

## The Princess Of Curdled Milk

She murdered Ben and Jerry,  
Sprinkled ice around the rim.  
She churned the gooey middle  
Till it solidified, a chocolate flavored rock.

Endless glasses of chunky milk have popped up  
Like mushrooms and for every wobbly body  
I dump down the sink, soft plop,  
Another appears. *The pain*, she says, *O the pain*.  
She lives in the fridge; I see her sometimes when I'm hungry.  
She only has to tap tap a wand made of stars  
And my milk, everywhere, goes hard.

Her spit is peach and creamy  
(She has a tendency to drool)  
And calcium rivers in her veins.  
My toes swim in the puddles of her throat  
And play with bits of cheese she's left napping in the rug,  
Yellow speckled now and gone brown.

She's propped up by the butter,  
Mulling my fate  
Sprawling on the yogurt  
Without an expiration date.

## Alice Leaves The Page

She pushes words with grown up arms, stands on white plains  
Made of paper. All things grow into what they are—the trees  
Are tall stacked minutes full up with bitten lips, new beginnings,  
Relationships with cats.

Alice is emerged from paragraph apartments, remnants  
Of dark sky and purple flowers wrapped loosely around her shoulders,  
Here is her going—outward a torso spins, in awe of even the sidewalk  
A sky so very blue each morning with the night still on her,  
Quotation marks like combs holding back her hair.

Alice is erupting in foreign—  
No name open into the earth into disease  
When she only wishes to speak to a synapse,  
What happens when words live.

She is waking and sleeping like humans, bottom's not stopped  
But falling, blurry, the peak is not a mountain but a moment  
In so many lights, her book become a heart.

The billboards convince her she's in need of much plastic fixing.

She remembers Wonderland summer and midnight setting sun,  
Sits with a queen overlooking the city.  
There she is a memory,  
Puddles of rain at their feet.

There were children before her, and children  
In Wonderland now. The ground is split with the seasons,  
Life is uneven—cycles do exist.

Alice is no world outside of her flesh,  
And outside of flesh is no world, but there's the words—a brown plant  
Grown over into being, if only in the silent exchange between strangers.  
This is not what she strives for, but what strives:

Separate ached parts  
Matches and mismatches  
Lung and liver  
Pages of a book.

To My Severed Finger (01/28/05)

*It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.*

*Lewis Carroll*

Blood spills on hospital blankets  
And it looks thin, fake.  
I move my hand in the white while things fade.  
Broken skin, a gash brightens  
The room, the curving curtain.  
I can't process words in this midst—I watch myself, see bending dreams  
Leave a body.  
Pain is not so much a word  
As it is my head light, a man left waiting  
In the waiting room—he told me the way  
To make a tourniquet  
Incase it happens again,  
Or if I'm ever in a war.

I've never been to war,  
But I did try to open a package  
With a knife and it slipped, rainy Friday.  
So how is my life hunched  
On an open stage  
Here  
Before my eyes

From a cut, tendons untouched,  
How is it waving goodbye  
When I still type and drive and kiss  
In not now but another—  
I can't go back.  
The moment rolls forward and I can't think this past.  
I make new; outside winds pickup and gust.

I've accumulated life, tubular gauze made special for small appendages,  
Dr. Watson's scissors, white tape that looks like a bendable fence.  
I've got black stitch thread holding my finger together, my Frankenstein part,  
I'm a human doll in this forward

Now. Blood black dots surround a closing scar, tender.

Then the stage opens, nine healthy fingers in a dance ambient and gentle,  
My severed finger center of a semi-circle, imperfect and beautiful  
With a gory story, not mine but its own.

A still beat, little things spin again because the world re-wants me,

And this niche of time, my finger's and mine  
Had to happen.

Swansea

The last roundabout before my stop,  
End of the world, approaches.  
This one is called Three O'clock.  
Sticky green blots on gray sky,  
Thin brown trunks swirl before the bus.  
We wobble over narrow road,  
Slow to home. I rehearse.  
*Bryn* means hill,  
*Cymru*: I live in Wales,  
Not in a whale.

My groceries swim  
In a brown bag cage,  
Mingling with other groceries.  
I eye the girl in the Window  
Because she first eyes me,  
My ice cream gnawed and swallowed  
By her ground beef.

A busload considers the Atlantic,  
Coldest this side of the sea.  
Sideways rain unleashes vicious winter;  
Shells break on the beach.  
Only wind walks;  
Ginger sky grows pink.

I like the sign that reads *Abertawe*  
Because I know what it means.  
The reflection of my face in the window  
Squints into a painting: Girl Being Welsh For A Year,  
This one never speaks, but watches her bags  
Like a child, smiles hard with cherry cheeks.

## Alice Rethinks Herself

She finds one day it's hard to look at people  
As they pass, not through her, but near.  
They keep something  
Close, and gain distance  
With the bottoms of their shoes.  
Lately what disturbs her  
Is the amount of T.V. it takes  
To entertain, to fill the Real  
Void,  
As if watching  
The way God watches  
All crazy life  
Is not enough.

Alice went walking on a road  
Lit with the light of tall trees.  
No wind, still dry air.  
The Cheshire Cat swung down  
From a branch to tell her  
About the other kids in Wonderland,  
How they've been,  
Who's still there.

The faces that follow are individual  
And they dream so much  
You can hear a great roar at night  
When half the world sleeps.

She finds herself home by late afternoon,  
On the couch  
In the basement of her parents' house  
Watching reruns of *Friends*.

This, she thinks, is history in the making.

She thinks of other things she could be doing:  
Feeding ducks or doing dishes  
Taking a long bath  
Or a long deep breath,  
But it's all become so fast.

*America, ba.*

Nothing is what she originally thought.

She rests on a pillow,  
Her body, white limbed from the coming of winter,  
Slowing of the sun, is covered with a sham.

Her legs and head have slowed  
And blue eyes fix on pixels.

## The Dangers Of Thinking

I'm bundled up in blankets in the middle  
Of imaginary time. Warm and anxious rises  
From my bedroom carpet;  
The room is pink and white with lamp.  
Wind outside rattles the window  
And a great day wraps hands around the earth.  
Solitude sounds an alarm—sometimes days are great  
And no one knows why.

I twiddle parts like fingers—toes, eyebrows  
Ankle and nose—My brain has taken over.  
I read covers of *Time* and *People*.  
These words have me risen in a thinning  
Of people and time—a new face and shoes,  
Other versions of lives hung  
In bright sky baskets  
From what look like stars.  
Really they are planes so loud  
In their landing they shake the walls.  
I hear children playing basketball outside,  
Their voices the random strings of my sonata.

Meanwhile someone sits on a skyscraper  
Holding my life like a book, a witness  
Of this sharp, clear moving picture—  
A reel, my fingers and feet unwound.  
He's the Angel of Analysis, called  
By this sudden onset  
Of unnecessary thinking, this sick boredom  
About to clock me, take me down.  
Something like a vacuum sucks my body through  
A cheap piece of shag carpet,  
Endless—  
And then I'm in the new world.

Children are everywhere, playing with grass  
And jumping up  
To catch stars and put them in jars.  
Black sky opens over burnt scalps—  
Pig tails, cowlicks bounce and little boy ears stick out.  
They are drunk with sun,  
But no sun about, only what remains—  
The warm glow of summer in their bellies,  
The cold crunch of fruit,

I can breathe.

One girl's jar is empty;  
She asks me why the stars refuse their capture.  
Still trees, blown flood of blue flowers,  
Such a sad heart beats in me for mine.  
Is it silly to think a star would surrender its light to a jar?

We reach no fine end.  
So while others chase after the light of the night,  
She stops and in stopping  
Stops time.

We sit and watch the world unfold in pieces—  
One clover and clipping and grass at a time  
Like a sea of breath and wet jackets, and laughing at clouds  
Spreading over the plain from a sudden sprinkling of rain.

## Days Of 2001

Then I spent Christmas in Switzerland with a boy named Tony who got on my every nerve. Something in me had broken, and I wanted an adventure with anyone. We jumped out of a plane together; afterwards Tony sang *Free Fallin'* under his breath all day as if he didn't know he was doing it, tapping his thigh and howling at the scenery. His eyes were very big. I felt his wonder too, but I didn't want to share it. We ate breakfast and dinner at the hostel, breads and jams; other travelers asked us questions as if we were a couple. I smiled twice to be polite. Next morning I set out to explore the town, a female Thoreau, because I'd had enough of Tony, his person, his singing, even his name. In my wilderness, I met a Swiss farmer who spoke four languages. He was short and stocky, going bald, and I was sure he was an angel sent to rescue me from the incessant singing, any connection I just couldn't make. It had started to snow hard, the air around me silent, the town sounding asleep. His umbrella was a canopy; he knew no English—in this space beneath the sky we could speak. He took me to the house where he worked, into the basement that was full of blocks of cheese. I felt like Alice. We fed the ducks behind the house; he took me to a shop and bought me coffee. The afternoon closed up and we walked among bushes, crunched the snow with our shoes. Then he grabbed my ass. The last day of our trip, I decided I needed a break from all people, so I took a train to Laterbrunnen, to hike, or something like it. The mountains there were so high. It was a Sunday and no one was around. I walked up a marked trail, cautious, through trees painted with snow and past frozen waterfalls, icicles. I was hot from an uphill battle with the rocks, and it felt good to wipe away the sweat, the people, to be a broken girl, alone, if only for a day.

## Tattoos In Spring

*The wind is arms* is the first thing  
I think, how the first thing  
I ever want to write about  
Is the wind.

Today it's awfully windy  
In this long dry city,  
And it blow dries my hair  
Like a stylist might,  
All being teased.

In the spring of things  
I half expect to see a dinosaur  
Walking down Maryland Parkway.  
That would be great. But then,  
It might stomp me out  
Forever.

I have to eat up the wind  
To be happy today  
And it will go through me  
Like a spring thing.  
Like a Genesis song,  
*You gotta get in  
To get out,*  
Like a song about the healer.

I forget that I got a tattoo  
When I was only seventeen.  
I forget the Cheshire Cat's lips  
In a big wide smile,  
The light and dark pinks,  
Tail winding up,  
Paw picking its teeth.  
I forget when it was fresh,  
His mouth speckled with my blood;  
Looked like he'd eaten Alice right up.

Then I see it in the mirror,  
Bare naked back  
And it heals me  
Because it's there, foreign,  
A little stupid  
But bled into my back

Forever, and outside  
The wind whips up  
For another noisy storm.

## Some Wonderland

I turn silent past the seascape  
As if I'm not awake,  
Rushing wet waves  
Round a rocked wall  
And there's a walrus with whiskers  
Trotting up the road in cowboy boots.

I step back  
With a quick scoot, afraid  
He might be hungry or in need  
Of a hat. After all, I've never seen  
Such a creature  
In such a strange daylight feature.

I clutch my plastic crown.  
Its shine bends in the light—a fracture.  
He peeks past his billowy butt with big eyes  
More lovely than half dollars. They curve around  
The way the world curves when it's a globe,  
Finger pressed lightly, looking for a country,  
Somewhere to go.

The walrus signals with a paw  
For me to follow. Don't know why,  
But I do. Amazing. I become  
Part of a two-mortal herd  
Like the sun is now part  
Of the impetus earth.

My thighs and calves tingle  
As we march uphill away from the water, the white  
White water, the dry sand wet land.  
My eyes burn—I am already tired from this day.

I wonder, where is my walking,  
Where is Thoreau on his hot journey, words  
Streaming, how the walrus has  
Soulful eyes, human-like, barking?  
His plush blob body trundles forward  
Without a word of his own,  
A still shot of memory no one remembers, it hangs  
Over us both  
These young days—but we travel,  
We travel that way.

THE KID WE STILL ARE

*Children are all foreigners*  
*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## Football Head

With an oblong noggin he walks, no struts, through camp. Deadpan man; the kids can't touch him. Blonde spikes spurt from brown roots, covering the strange fixed shape of his skull. Freckled, scrawny limbed, he sports a smug little grimace. *You know, he's a straight shooter, that boy. His brother's not nearly as aerodynamic.* In between hours I run into the boy as he limps, face contorted into an achy, must-they- all-pretend-I'm-uninjured look? I take him to first aid for a tiny scrape on his ankle, a scab he'd picked with his dirt ridden, chewed up boy nails, because no scab can go unpicked. He confesses a dark secret: *I pooped on the floor of the boy's bathroom, and we become friends. Why'd you do that,* I ask. *Somebody dared me.* The staff has concluded he must have come out funny the day he was born. Maybe his mother squeezed a little too hard. His group comes to dance after lunch; he wiggles even when the music stops. *Dylan, you know you 're on time out, go sit.* He swivels his head no, back and forth with a quick, staggered rhythm. His counselor lifts him off the stage, boy legs moving furiously, like bicycle wheels spinning to silence and then down, sullen, standing, shoulders slumped. Then he begins beboppin' his football head to the incessant *umpa umpa umpa ump* of Disco Inferno and does his best Jon Travolta. His counselor stops me mid-hustle, as if the hustle is a crime. *Tomorrow we're not even going swimming; you can thank our star performer for that.* He stands up slowly, grandly, and takes four staccato bows.

## Football Head Part 2

If Dylan had a camp name, it would be Bones.  
This is what he told us. Sun strokes,  
Tree stump necklace with the word strangling his throat.

*Bones?*

He answers quickly,  
With an air of wit, and I see him.

*Yeah, my name's Bones.*

## Talent Show

Rain assails from a dense gray  
And drowns us for an hour in Southern California,  
Where it never rains.

Christopher pounds a wet concrete path  
With awkward skips.  
He balances a water bottle on his head,  
Considers the brim of my hat  
Through thick glasses and talks about  
How he gets his logic. Bushy eyes push up  
With a sad seven-years down countenance.  
He asks me why I'm not married.  
The bottoms of my braids drip,  
Making mini-islands on his sleeve.

*I know I'm supposed to recite a poem while balancing  
A bottle of water on my head, but I've decided  
To take the bottle out of my act.  
I don't want it to distract people from the poem.*

The sky tips clear; Christopher sits alone.  
Camp dries quick and fallings of lunchtime  
Settle premature while other kids hit each other  
And laugh.

The boy moves on;  
Singing to himself, he does a warped version  
Of the Mexican Hat Dance with his shadow  
Because the sun has reappeared.

## Dance Of The Paintball Park

### *A Field Trip*

I shuffle over pink and purple paintballs  
And our general for the day throws me a look.  
*Don't mind her, she's the dance girl.*  
I size up my campers  
In their ripped fatigues (not from war,  
But other games like these).  
I want to be a warrior,  
But the dream leaves quick—  
Why can't I kill  
Like these humans do?

Puny boys and fat boys clutch their guns,  
Scooter's ready to spill some guts.  
He stands next to me while we sing  
*The Star Spangled Banner*, mostly to each other  
And the flag waves loosely, like it wants to listen.  
He eyes the legions of men  
As the sun sears our heads and I remember his  
His disco pose from dance class the day before,  
His goofy smile.  
*Camp James party, please report to Bosnia.*  
*Your game will commence in fifteen minutes.*

At camp, the kids call me Little Duckling  
But that doesn't work here,  
So they refer to me as 'L.D.'  
I hide in a bush the entire first game,  
Simmering in my army greens  
And when I hear the news that it's over,  
I emerge from the woods like a conqueror,  
Sit on a bench and tie victory ribbons in my hair.  
Seems when we go to war, people are afraid  
Because we have camp names: Ranger, Frog, Bronx Bomber.  
We speak in code, the world our own, still

Clarity strikes deep like a finger wound  
Around 9:53. I'm hiding in a shed in Vietnam,  
Suspended in a trash can as I listen  
To my own wet breathing and fear that has suddenly  
Taken me. I don't know where it came from.  
It hits me along with some massive  
Hunger pains, so by 10:07,  
I quit.

I become enamored with the sound a paintball makes  
When I pop it with my shoe.  
I love to watch the color ooze from its plastic shell  
And bake on hot cement  
While I chew on a foot long hot dog.  
The campers pass me, growling in defeat, others in triumph,  
All of them animal, and sort of  
Concerned. *Hey, L.D., you coming?*  
*No, don't wanna get killed. Maybe later.*  
I don't know which is more ridiculous: the game or the way  
I choose the sun, the forgotten ammo seeping onto the blacktop,  
Painting the bottoms of my sneakers.

I think of what dances  
I'll teach the kids Monday morning  
The rest of the day.

## The Boy Who Had A Seizure

After things cooled in the pool, I knew who he was but the boy remembered nothing. Black canvas, Matthew nearly drowned at a water park where kids go in the summer to play, little legs and arms splashing, wrinkling in so much water, baking in the sun. After things cooled some more he came to dance with a real name, sat close to me on stage and drooped his boy body over my thighs the size of his head. He mocked everything I said in a voice like a mouse, muttering with quick, inadvertent squeaks. He made me laugh; I had never heard him speak. Life was easy now, I had a translator. He was small waving gestures and a brand new signature cock of the head, a language spoken only by six-year olds. The next day Matthew fell asleep in the middle of a field with his mouth gaping open, as if giving permission for bugs to come in and make a home. He woke up with sideways eyes that wanted to leave his head somehow, and he was wiser. This change was overnight; he knew a secret. He had gained a seventh sense: the ability to pierce through the junk of grown ups, because he wanted us to know him really, despite a new-found fame.

## Trash Bags

Pigtails graze my nose with sweat. Me and Ryan Misco, six years old, dance silly like we're both six under a sun that takes the sky completely. A small smile stretches on his face, but his eyes are serious. He does the robot, wild and methodical at the same time. I let my memory loose. We run to Round Up, the center of camp, but not without passing the tree that smells like someone fatted, no matter the time of day. I am the best kind of tired; I'll sleep like a kid tonight. We enter the amphitheater, an arena of smells: SPF 50, chlorine in hair, Otter Pops, exhaustion. I watch Ryan standing near the concrete stage where every camper wants to dance, tell a joke, be a star. His eyes fix on a microphone. He sneaks it with a darting motion and talks in a voice like a game show host: *Who picked up the most trash today?* A girl leaps her way across the concrete floor and waves two bags of half eaten apples and empty chip bags through the air. Trash means everything at camp; it is status. Ryan acknowledges the girl with eye contact, something grown ups rarely do. He speaks again through the microphone, makes his voice deep and says, *you go girlfriend*. His counselor calls him to come back; Ryan's face drops as he hunches his way back to the bleachers, but somehow he knows better than this. He will not be defeated. His slanty blue eyes wrinkle with schemes and like a born entertainer, but more than that, like someone who cannot help but let this life love him, he boomerangs back to the stage when no one is watching. Into the spotlight he arises, a king, a talk show host. He picks up the mic with a subtle six-year old mystere. Then we hear through the speakers: *Let me hear you scream!* And then we roar for no reason, no real reason, anyway.

On Being A Camp Counselor For Very Rich Girls  
*Camp Vega, 2005*

Maribel dances in the bunk with her non-hips  
And holds her head as if she gets something  
About boys.

Just outside is hard smelly rain,  
Alex and Janie cry when the storm comes,  
Their bodies small, eyes eleven, betrothed  
To bright light that cracks the sky.

Maine is strange weather.  
When she least expects it,  
Sticky sun evaporates, making way for black  
Thunder clouds loud as God.

Pink sheets and candy bar pillows cover the wood of their bunks.  
There's enough outlets to charge the I-pods  
Where the woods are.

Rory wakes me up at four A.M  
To tell me of the thoughts  
That are eating her—so much she can't take it.  
She won't stop crying till summer's over.  
One word refuses to leave her head.  
She says that it hangs there like a giant neon sign,  
Flashing, making her dizzy: FEELING.

Maine is a state of trees, open for breathing.

My girls hang from the rafters in their underwear  
Contemplating the Mormons,  
Then make cracks about the Asian women  
Who give them manicures at home.

I think back at summer's end, to leave a space  
So easy, without any pieces  
Of me left behind.

It's always a ping-pong of watching and doing,  
In between Vegas and Maine  
Is the seat of a passenger plane—  
If only I could enjoy the between,  
Look back when there comes an end, and be in it.

What's amazing is none of the detail,  
What's amazing is what is left:  
Maine is a girl to me now.

## The Kid We Still Are

My body stands  
On the tops of many wild worlds—  
A glowing field of onions,  
The past peels me.

Once I was She-Ra, Princess of Power  
And hair that comes out with a brush,  
Everything left  
In the after-hour.

The child in me is a day-tide dream,  
Rising. She naps in my chest or  
Left ventricle, braids  
Tiny blue veins—there's no room  
For my lungs.  
I'm still not pregnant  
But my knocked up cousin was.

My belly's empty,  
Like I've got nothing  
To look forward to today—  
The blank sky floats above me,  
A silver cafeteria tray.  
I watch it from a precipice  
Becoming  
Less  
And less.  
I know that when it comes,  
I won't be hungry.

There's a child in me still.  
Her bones are in my blood,  
The wet drops and colors  
I am  
But can't see.  
I drop the notion  
Of many Decembers  
Of holly,  
Holy me.  
I know I'll always feel at home  
Somewhere else  
Like Silent Night in winter,  
Long black robes  
And golden Christmas bells

It's a great story like the sidewalks,  
The motorways, the roundabouts  
We go  
Into the dark night,  
The quiet night.  
But under someone's winter boots  
I swear the snow is sloshing  
And overhead the wind walks,  
Where my unborn children fight  
So someone must be watching.

WHERE THE WORDS BE

*Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.*  
*Albert Einstein*

From A Bud

Late at night there is creeping life;  
It grows in a hairy heart.

Twisting itself in knots,  
It pushes its way up  
And out of the skin;  
Tonight she can sleep.

She applauds herself  
With a glass of wine  
For cutting it off  
But she cut too deep.

## Chrysalis

Five o'clock evening sun.  
Stammering man, my next door neighbor  
Never eats. *Waste of time*, he says, faded overalls  
White hair, cigar.  
He knows when I'm hurting,  
The days I come home feeling I was  
Ineffective with my students.  
*Was it only one, teacher, give it rest,*  
When their mornings stern into mine.

He swings his wrinkled hips, walks with a limp  
And mount his hands on the yellow chipped fence  
That connects my house  
And his. He gives me grapes  
From a Zip-lock bag and says, *life, teacher*  
*It could kill you.*

The juice from the grapes  
Makes canals in my mouth.  
They river the back of my throat  
So dry this hot autumn.  
Then blue butterflies erupt from his pockets,  
Putter near my nose.

He smiles crooked as I rake leaves,  
Tells me to truck forward though nothing feels  
Like fall. Sandy, his pig, snouts and sniffs his feet,  
Whips her eyes into mine with a startled look.  
She knows that my hands have been irrational  
With caterpillars. I can hardly look at his girls.  
They give their kind of kisses,  
Tickle my lashes and laugh so tiny.

Later I'll go inside and sprout my own wings,  
Clean the cupboards, throw away stale cookies  
And down the stale chips. I'll watch Mr. Man  
Through the kitchen window as he rocks  
In a chair on the porch next door,  
Bugs and butterflies making their way home  
To the foot of his rocker.

## Rest

Their black button eyes are ready for yours, wherever they hang out, smoking cigars,  
Shootin' the shit in Sheepland. With little legs they skulk through your window  
On a wire. Fluff falls on your eyelashes and becomes enough to sleep,  
Usually, but tonight they tip-toe in on a cloud. Chance of dreams:  
20%. You're nuzzled under lumpy covers, wishing  
For the haze to part; cold and collecting  
Their shadows, waiting  
To quietly count  
The flock.

## Confessions From A Poet Coma

In the down and out, my sun  
And cloud stopped working  
All because of you  
So I slept standing up for a year,  
A walking Lisa Van Winkle.

I think I may have lived my life,  
All the years  
I was a baby  
And an in between  
Like it is in the movies,  
And I feel nothing.  
No pain, only pictures—  
My grid, my map,  
My beautiful proof.

Time, I've noticed the way  
You cure me  
Of the love-ailments.  
I watch the nonstars  
And white paper clouds,  
I circle empty parking lots,  
Find dark apples shriveled  
In the fridge  
Where everything goes to rot.  
And the Las Vegas empty says  
It's hard to eat when your poet organs  
Are bleeding.

I brush the dirt from my clothes,  
Feeling such immensity  
And my brain makes beautiful.  
I wonder in words, always  
Words. Something  
You never understood.  
Right now I'm the only girl  
In the world, an experiment  
Already falling through  
The earth falling presently, with  
No point to plot, no ball marker  
No giant dartboard like a giant  
Game of chess where Alice  
Became a queen.

I feel like I've swallowed  
The wind and I approach  
The seventh square, closer  
Now to royalty, which is good,  
Because I need a tilted crown,  
But my nerves have torn.

And there's wonder in this—  
I let myself rot like bananas.  
I pressed my body down  
And died, crossed the street  
In a cross walk where people  
Really die—  
Dead girl walking  
Now I'm so awake

I can't sleep. I take this living,  
I dip it in honey, eat it up  
With a hot sopapita.  
My body shakes, my nerves  
Have gladly torn  
As if I didn't know the world and  
The world has become  
A great big space.  
I walk out of a tomb  
Without you  
And into it  
As if I'd just been born.

## Photo Opp.

Annie Leibovitz is coming to do us, so I wait on the couch. Living light brushes the blinds; they crackle in the living room. My mother keeps picture books of famous people, sits and stares all day, as if it might change her when we leave again. I hover over coffee table books. Will I look as good as Jodie Foster in the red dress? I flip to Whoopie Goldberg in a bathtub of milk. Mom says, *I don't get that woman*. Sting in crusty mud. She says *yum*. Silly photography. This is how I've been replaced. Then the doorbell rings, making the house shake like a belly quake, as good as Christmas when you're five. It isn't Annie, it's the pizza man. My brother's feet punch the staircase, heavy and hungry. When Annie comes, she's going to flow my hair with a fan and pose me in front of a mirror. I'll make sex to my face, I'll be painted with yellow. Then I'll reach for sink like I'm wanting to wash it off, like a magazine ache, like a model's strawberry face. Mom will be wrapped in a towel, hair 80% wet, plucking her eyebrows and drawing them in with the portable T.V set to HSN. *These earrings are just fabulous*. Brother's in his room; no one knows what he's doing so Annie will kick in the door, find him lying in a pool of A-I Steak Sauce, eyes bugged out and mouth in a traumatized 'O.' She will conclude that the pizza man brought a steak instead of a pizza pie and hence my brother will have died of disappointment. When she's finished, beneath the picture will read: *Lisa in bathroom, Mom in towel in bathroom, brother disappears with 'pizza', and father nowhere to be found, 2004.*

## In The Laundry Room

My sweater rips because I'm anxious.  
A large man with icicles on his beard  
Looks me a stare (I've got quarters for eyes  
And he finds it funny, the Money Money Man).

I play with my coin-face while the washers  
Lurch, plugged in, driers rump and warm me  
And dimes sputter from my ears.

My sweater continues its ripping.  
*What a hoot*, says the icicle man, moldy brie  
In his wrinkled left hand.

The stink is so great that oops, there flies  
My nose. Disconnected by cheese, I sigh  
As I sit on an empty machine, noseless  
Unsmelling, more bored than before.

To make matters worse, an old lint-ridden  
Shoelace slithers past my dangling feet,  
Only motion this side of the city.

From A Wall

A postcard of Delaware falls on my bed  
Like a giant leaf  
Because my arms don't reach that high.  
Lavender flowers are rectangles  
Scattered in sheets,  
The scent of clothes from an upscale store  
Is thick and I run into my head,  
Seeing more flesh in  
Flesh because so much of it falls  
With the whip of shrunken helicopters,

Like a sweet memory  
Like nature

And lands in my dirty hair  
While I'm in bed but awake,  
Thinking of a soon-to-be ex-  
Student, one year younger than me,  
Who said *I miss you* just last night  
In a very lucid dream.

Through A Blinded Window

On *this* particular morning in February,  
Seventy degrees slapping California  
Residents straight on their concrete butts under  
A yellow sun going *duh*,  
The face of an angel in my yellow washcloth  
Sticks her tongue out at me.

The nerve.

Messy slash clean,  
A new beginning in warm water  
And soft blotting taps.  
*Splat*, I slap her outta my towel,  
New girl on the marble.

*How's it, new girl?*  
Splat again (got a cockroach under  
My new white sandal). I lean too  
Close to the vanity and now there's  
Toothpaste on my pants.

*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*  
And most everything, all,  
Meets me in the marble.

## The Sky Talks To Me About My Next Birthday

You will find yourself  
Bolted to the afternoon  
But the field, it swoons.  
Catch on.

Your brother may have  
Called on the wrong day,  
But it's still coming.

You will feel your brain  
Tipping in a light dome  
Endless of me, of white,  
Because horizon's head  
Is not a line, but a circle.  
You'll notice gray blue  
Gray and crystal blades  
Growing thinly between  
A lower region  
Of earth and your feet.  
You will sustain yourself  
With air and itchy grass  
But no breeze.

Walking, not walking,  
A branch newly rooted  
By wet land and human hands  
Will trip you, take you  
To the ground.

It isn't nature.

Your nose mud-snuggles the dirt,  
Skin sticks lightly  
On bone but faded, sinking  
Age in your stomach  
Because you went walking.

You're free, Lisa, to sleep  
In darkness now  
With the T.V. on low.

## To The Flag

I pledge to peel my student's heads  
As long as I live in America.  
Like living onions their foreheads scrunch  
While my fingers pick and dig.  
When the smell hits me, I cry—  
They are learning so much  
About words.

In the space of a gray bricked classroom  
That stands, one clock breaks  
And glass bits stick in my shoes.  
I tip toe; blood soaks my feet  
While I try to teach.

We are one bulging nation under a big roof  
With permission to crack and curse,  
Talk about body parts because it's college,  
Where free thoughts waft.

All of us pause—on guard. We talk about  
The president and mustard leaks from the ceiling.

## Traffic Feels Like

My life is a bowl of fettuccini marinara thinning out as I eat.  
Then it empties complete and all I see is ceramic,  
More white than red.  
The city advertises itself to itself,  
And then, I think—it isn't a metaphor,  
I'm just hungry.

Between now and transitory home is off white lights and mad people,  
Another day near its end—why mornings are more than waking up,  
But existing all over again.

A big red truck stops in front of me.  
Its bumper reads: *Like my driving?*  
*Call 1-800-EAT SHIT* and a minute later—  
*In case of rapture, the car's yours.*

One life over, a middle-aged man leans out the window of his car,  
Whistles, like saying Hey lady, I think I'm very sexy, and if I whistle,  
I suspect you'll put your car in park and join me  
For an early evening rendezvous on 1-95.

The angel on my shoulder gives me a swift kick, convinced  
There might be something the man needs to tell me,  
Without which I might not survive—Shakespeare  
Or a proverb, something kind.  
She has become the eternal optimist;  
I'd like to kill her.

Human to human, we are a grid of metal and horns,  
A world of us stopped.  
I see only my hands, my skinny wrists,  
My finger tapping to a beat.  
This moment is the world—  
A big long sigh.

The day will speak in flattened words—not life  
But representation, as if I need a lawyer to defend  
My purpose for living.  
The road says things like *stripping away* and *next exit*  
In soft emerald, another breath,  
The color jade, what becomes us.  
This city is a strange distraction from the green  
Of living leaves and hills.

The angel on my shoulder dangles her feet, leaves me some nice bruises.  
She quit smoking, stopped dying her hair unnatural colors, only thinks  
The most wonderful things of strangers since Spring.

But Lisa, what if that man is a poet?  
I won't know.

The moment has closed me up, a pre-boarding blossom,  
The making of a man into what he's not—a word.

Barely an evening at all, I'm stuck in pre-twilight  
With a rainbow split  
By the Stratosphere.

In the east is the sun glowing up what's left  
Of the hour.  
I wonder if the man sees it, feels  
The day betray us  
So rapid I have to catch it  
Before it leaves.

## Cairngorm Dream

This is quiet like there never was a sound—waves  
Sometimes shower me instead of break or crash.

My body is brave.

The crabs move tap tapping toward me,  
Pinching my skin with their claws.

Three green kites cast themselves into the sky.  
There is no wind, but they fly steady.

I ask the kites  
To blanket what's left of my body.

The crabs stop to cough and when I look again  
They are Swingline staplers breaking on the beach.

I think it odd, these munching office things  
Under the moon, admiring the sea.

Their mouths open/close,  
Sound like many great crashes.

They fasten my body to the three green kites,  
Then chomp at the seams, making a kite mistress me.

I cast my brave body  
Up into an open space

For the first time uncertain of death  
Or of the days soon to come.

## Notes From the Underground

Tonight you take the driver's seat, hover over other nights,  
Starry eyed, dreamy dreamer that you are.

Beyond the bug-splashed windshield

Quite junk-like

All the streets are funny—you wonder in the in between,  
The conscious and unconscious man mushed together  
In the cold, cold weather,  
Oatmeal for the soul.

You wonder, could it be I'm underground

Or the howling of a hound, could it be I am in love with me,  
With both my measly foot and then it walks on word thoughts,  
A great made sidewalk of  
*Feet foot feet.*

This quiet comes from me, The Cannabis Elf.

I live inside the trunk of your car where I hide,  
Suspenders and elf hat from the world.

I think sea thoughts,

Wave and weed, my brain is the bob of a jellyfish sting,  
The groove of a turtle shell, the black eyes of eleven crab sleeves.

I smoke my dope from a purple pipe  
At night when you're all starry eyed and driving.

See that bastard,  
The one who just cut you off, lights that blind you  
In the mirror, hip-hop thumpety thump, license plate

Outlined in neon green?  
You don't mind it, you're fine.  
It's a wonder, it's bliss  
Because you're high, my friend,  
On ruby red cannabis.

There are no stars to your surprise, they've been collected  
In your eyes.

There's just you and the street.  
No metal, no grooves, no wheel and no seat.

You'll glide.  
You'll fly, you'll glide, all starry eyed,

But you wont see the stars—  
There'll be no stars at all  
Only your eyes and the white leaves  
Of trees.

This calm is unlike a sky blanket or blinds,  
More like a river that cleans out your liver.

It's better for bile than presents,  
Than all holidays.  
Santa fired me from Christmas  
So I bring you some of this—

White lines isn't powder

But it's light in your eyes.  
Then the stars will leave,  
Refasten to the sky.

White through camera lens,  
Night vision, all people are green skinned  
Like me. Now you'll notice  
When the moon's a yellow globe.  
A bright sun at midnight, protection-full,  
But you don't need to know.

I stretch my muscles all high like this—  
On ruby red cannabis.

## Word Court

Most hear the Real in  
The Quiet. Touching life  
Takes the backseat in existing, it seems.

I have seen it  
Glow,  
Clearly prolific,  
Well then, why do I sit?

The sun is in this  
Frenzy, of sorts  
Glowing like the pregnant girl I've never been  
But my knocked up cousin is.

And what does a girl do without any sorts to spare?

Mine I find in the vast fields  
I watched like moving pictures  
Of possibility  
Out the window,  
The backseat inhabitant of my mother's car.

My second word was *gasthole*,  
My mother liked to curse when she drove.

Lately, the world the people  
Move without feeling  
From behind these brown eyes.  
The landscape escapes me,  
The clouds have met their demise  
In bottles.

My sidewalks are soft, the floating men in suits  
Drink coffee, are less impressive than before.  
Didn't Thoreau say to be wary of a job  
In which you need new clothes?

Why in this beautiful Word Court  
Of noses and attached earlobes  
Are we so fascinated by the known?  
The unsorts and the anti-frenzy.

I get mine from a tension ball, keeps up from  
The rolling river, the one I hear about in pretty songs.

The sun insulates buildings  
And we, the mad jesters, presume we need none

## The Quarterly Clam

A boy's shoulders hunch on the edge—  
The place where the sidewalk begins again  
And again. He has spiders in his eyes.  
They came while he dreamed  
Of the deadest night  
And stayed.

Now he hears the man singing  
While he dangles his feet from the porch,  
Sometimes looks up without worry.

When he watches,  
Everything has legs, even brown bushes  
On his neighbor's lawn, and the asphalt.  
He can wait for anything—the spiders  
Make the sun and rain tip close.

Another boy pedals fast on his bike,  
Making way through the morning paper route.  
Today the day clouds are black and blue  
From a bad fight, and he picks up the news  
That lands at his shoes.

He picks up The Quarterly Clam,  
Flicks the guck from his hands—  
The stuff the sea left.  
He reads the headlines,  
Top story today: A woman in burgundy  
Wanders from house to house,  
Desperate and tired. Don't let her in,  
She's gone crazy searching for spiders.

## Where the Words Be

I want to take the T.V.'s from everybody's homes  
And crush them up, but then I wonder,  
How will I be human, how  
Will I ever connect with my students?  
Something in the backroom pops and grits its teeth,  
A cappuccino machine.

I want to build a fire that burns even the stars  
Out of magazines—I flip through *People*,  
Because I'm a person  
And now I know which dresses didn't work  
At the Oscars.  
This is important,  
This is a great big hot air balloon  
Taking us up to the sun instead  
Of the moon, but we get there  
Too soon. The whole world pops  
Like coffee making.

I hear a woman say we speak too much in clichés  
And I say I'd listen, but it's raining cats and dogs  
Outside. I've gotta go.  
There's things to be done.  
I cannot be  
Here—this stool doesn't move.  
*This* breaks the strange silence in the after—  
I stand up like I'm in a movie  
And the lead female suddenly discovers something  
Real, something true.

The cats and dogs hit the ground so hard,  
A sudden lump forms in my gut and won't leave.  
But they roll over, unbruised, unbled,  
And walk away from us, from all of this.

I see my mother's Havonese  
Falling fast from the vast gray above,  
But for all my sexy, slow motion running,  
I can't make it in time.  
There's no rain, but make-up drools  
Down my cheeks. I'm not wearing any make-up,  
But God catches shadows in my eyes, blue and pinks.  
I cannot catch him or my mother's Havonese.  
He hits the street and rolls over, lets out a howl.

There are no cars today, only mammal rain.  
Carlos shakes the fall from his fur, trots toward me  
And jumps up, twirling in circles for a treat, for a bone.  
He looks at me with kind of human eyes, as if to say,  
Even I don't know how to break this.

GOD COMES OUT OF A GLOVE

*I imagine that yes is the only living thing.*  
*e. e. cummings*

Abba

I used to take movies like Schindler's List personally  
Because you taught me, silently, to be proud.  
I was eleven, you left the room without a word  
While I watched Hollywood's version of the Holocaust  
But we're divided now, dad.

Back to my tattoo,  
My pierced tongue  
And bellybutton,  
The insistent refusal to speak  
(These are the original ideas  
Of teenagers).

I spent your money on beer and  
Other things; lied to your face  
So I could sit on the cracked porch  
Of my friend's house and not even drink,  
But watch the mad rain hit the street so hard,  
Forgoing sleep.

Your hair is grayer than last year,  
But it still seems brown to me.

I feel five today. You listen  
To the storm in my throat.  
I've tried to break this line, but I can't.  
My hands are wet;  
I can hardly hold onto the phone.

My greatest rebellion is happening now; it's a good one.  
You say that you're proud of me;  
I tell you to stop.  
I don't know how you're so proud  
Of the girl that's in me now—  
My four-quarter faith, thin pages of a bible  
And the silver outline of a plastic fish  
Swim me upstream, take up  
The day these days. Still—

I would have loved to hear you speak  
At your Bar Mitzvah.

## Looking For Winter

The season rakes its rake,  
Golden like November orange.

Flaking skin,  
The leaves of an unswept porch,  
How ugly things like browning snow, a bored sky,  
Deadbeat friends become quiet in the afterglow.

Hometown fields are Wonderlands from their middles.  
Blizzards and hot tea with sugar, the deer that come out  
In bright headlights from behind the deck have soft eyes.

Really it's only the earth dying,  
Other winters in sweaters.  
I must make up new things to look forward to—  
To summers and springs and orangine leaves.

I ache for a winter that may never come—  
Come cold air, come frost and bite up my waiting nose.  
I seem to know the thing the children know.

I am the alpenglow, the snowing streets—  
Down comes pavement, hushed sticks and a vast empty  
Painting the roads warm.

## God In Winter

The chapel rivers under a  
Sky waved pink.  
White blue, the ribs of a fish  
Hang over the church.  
Tree sleeves travel in threads  
Like light. What's left;  
A sky waved pink  
Where pterodactyls flew,  
The ribs of a fish  
Hang over the church;  
I hang over it, too.

## Creep

The smell in this great big room  
Is my forehead,  
My cheeks, even my nose;  
A spider creeps through the pews  
Tipping us off, a ghost.  
*River of peace*  
*River of promise*  
Like water, I move  
To blend with the girls,  
But these clothes.  
My skirt sticks to the backs of my legs; static,  
Itchy. I fiddle with my blouse, tapping my toes,  
Tapping my toes.

A softer girl takes this body on, whispers  
When to lift my hands. The exact moment,  
She creeps, and I like her.  
We both feel the will of the world in this room,  
The sweat dripping down my legs  
From somewhere magical,  
But still I'm afraid  
For this girl in my body  
Because I have an inkling  
That I may lose her.  
Then my friend accidentally throws her hand in my face  
While she's praising God.

Jesus stands in the arc of the doorway, tapping his foot,  
Tapping his foot. The room moves hard.  
He eyes my outfit, sees the dim light in me  
Flickering in and out and steals me with a quick creep.  
My eyes become fixed on an inscription:  
*The gates of Hell shall not prevail against the church.*  
He throws me over his shoulder and tosses me  
Into the parking lot, muttering things  
I cannot understand.

I let out a grunt and brush myself off.  
God damn it, not again.

## Spirit

Things hit me in the doctor's office.  
Thermometer wedged between my lips,  
A nice enough nurse.  
Everything is normal inside, but my blood  
Feels imaginary pressure  
In these dark doctor chambers.  
I am alive  
On crinkled butcher paper,  
A to go order.  
This is here, room is subhuman.  
Walls lined with birth control charts  
Scream in a high-pitched gawk.

There is so much health at my disposal,  
Almost dripping from my fingers but not.  
Smoker's lungs, non-smoker's lungs,  
I don't know which ones I've got.

In so much body, I cannot find you, my spirit,  
In so much flesh, I don't know where you've gotten to,  
Always vanished in the middle of sterility: free HIV  
Testing, breast exams and cancer flown your face  
Out the window or hidden in a jar, all connective  
Tissue writhing, lost in a long stomach scar.

## Church and Poetry

This glob in my hand is sweet.  
But it keeps me from artists (my category,  
My Wonderland, my only offer)  
At once coming towards me,  
Demanding I make up my mind.

All I hope for is in the word *safe*.  
Not the word, but in it.  
I want my poetry to be this,  
But this liquid in my hands is many—

The Buddhist temple in a Welsh City  
Where I tried to meditate,  
Forget myself and pet a skinny woman's cats  
As much as

Switzerland, where I heard silence  
For the first time  
In frozen waterfalls and heavy snow,  
Hiked through a city a Sunday alone,  
As much as

Church of Our Savior sitting on a hill  
Like a house in a horror movie  
Where I read the Bible,  
An open gate as much as

Pennsylvania Dutch, the language of Lancaster County  
Where I used to drive,  
Watch the silos as much as

Atheists celebrating Christmas with a capital "C",  
As much as

American, tired, a girl.  
It's something to fill time, feel unwasted.  
All this mixes fine, a piece,  
A signature giving,  
Then me.

I want my poetry to be

Because these artists ache.  
They walk down literary halls,

They speak in the dark,  
Alighting the pavement, the leafless trees.

And then like that, I'm given,  
A moment, a bruised identity,  
Because I too am searching  
For a watchword.

## Two Short Poems On Perspective

### Move

My memory is many stops on a long road, and life is like this then and now. The way. Biting rain or nothing sun, I look back and there is happiness, like more than a longing to be in the then; all I see is what the sky sees. Clouds' eyes, stars, a telescope. I don't remember the chemical formulas in moments. Blood beating, rising pulse, falling breath. In the death of the moment, only it remains. Whether happy or sad—the *what* is gone. I look at pictures and ache, as if all this before now was easy. The way the sky sees us. I want to dismember myself, see this room like the ceiling, the tops of heads like tops of trees. These days are memories in houses and rooms; still I stand in someone's syntax as if it's necessary. I know in another world is a watcher, fixed on this now, and she sees something like entertainment, beautiful and dim and perfect improvisation.

### Move Some More

A bad mood is easier than motion. I am sunk in sheets and clotted with, then I'm up, torn from a half world, eyes burning. I enter into this day another force in human form. People line streets, hallways, doorways, walkways, shoes touch pavement, same solid ground lit by a giant yellow star—I find no comfort in any of it. Comfort always leaves me looking, empty, afraid. I discard it. A bad day is easy, but hurts the head. Movement is the struggle since morning, no granola bar, no milk. I think of the day I'll watch my life unfolding on an I-Max screen, without consequence, without pain. I will acquiesce into my memory, laugh because I cared so much, or so little, or never stopped to breathe. So much of it is just breathing. I will wonder why I wasn't happier, softer, lucid in the line at the store. I will wonder how I wrote this knowing there was sun outside, other countries and a theatre in the sky.

## Lost

God's side of the brain wavers clumsy over the Las Vegas strip. A man with a big white sign hawks at passersby with foot long margaritas and smokes, thrusts little red and white pamphlets about Jesus into unoccupied hands. My earth point plots further from tourists and open containers as I glide in motion slow. I pass by giant television sets, live action pirate shows. I'm kept from the sound of drunken fits and vacations; my eyes are fixed with excess of brown air, talking dirt sidewalks. I decide to take the way of an unoccupied industrial city, somewhere off Interstate 15. Unsure of exact location, I point north, putter on the gas and argue with God. Tonight he speaks in a rip he knows I'll hear. I always take it back when I tell him to his face: He isn't real. Mad citizens of the southwest bent on destination work His rules to a tizzy and pass over double yellow lines to pass me. His foundation cramps up. Bastards; I've got valid excuse not to drink, to drive slow; on quiet nights I don't even notice the wrecks that sprout towns of yellow tape on newly paved road. Should have jumped the man on the sidewalk and taught him how to tango. White lights on houses speak underneath silent, stony mountains and appear a part of the stars. I want to hear from God. The knob on my radio keeps company with me and miles of cloud pop out from the second dimension, waltzing, His picture blazing into a hush, warm.

## Days Of 2003

I confess to myself that God is a cult and bits of bitter snow begin to wisp about, tease autumn leaves. I decide to drive out into Amish country, so with my Bible in the passenger seat, we set off for salvation. The smell of manure sears our nostrils. Green hill, farmhouse and cow fill the afternoon, the windows, like a long strip of film in this vast empty. We stop at a sign that reads puppies for sale. A small man with a skinny brown beard and suspenders welcomes me into his house, while skinny clouds linger overhead and rows of trees do their adagio in the cold. One by one, his children come home from school. The white outline of the door frames them like pictures in a history book. They stand with lunch pails, bonnets and boots, wondering what I'm doing there, playing with their puppies and looking to me like angels. I ask to use the bathroom and grope around for the light switch that doesn't exist. Then I remember; there's no electricity here. The toilet begins to gurgles and I roll my eyes as I see a thin finger tap its nails on the rim. Jesus orders me to come into the pipes; I refuse. So he pulls me through the water and receiver of my phone. Now I sit on my couch with blood on my hands, talking to you and alone.

## Reconversion

I drove on narrow roads with the Book under my seat  
Through Intercourse, Pennsylvania saw an Amish girl  
Wearing my face.

Yellow fell soft on a thought of *Rumspinga*,  
Whether or not she joked  
About the name of her town.  
I thought of her head knotted up  
In cars and commandments Jesus and beer,  
The look of a boy ready to love her.

The pang that lives in her is in me  
And it strung us along like yards of yarn  
Over Lancaster County where I went to die  
The day of my reconversion.

The letters of our breakdown sputtered on a neon sign.  
They said: *And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet*,  
And I knew that the great day would unearth itself,  
Silos would crumble to the ground, the lights would go out  
And we'd be there, shortly.

## Days of 2004

I confess to my dad that I was wrong about God and not to worry, but I'm going back. It's winter again and old ghosts are surfacing, same faded pillowcases filling up with peanut butter cups and Hershey bars, like Halloween but the city is warmer now, the city is a sweet version of Hell and I'm swimming in it. I drive out to Red Rock Canyon with my Bible in the passenger seat, and off we go again; I've been taken back. *When you're going through Hell, keep going*, somebody said that. I take the five-dollar scenic drive, here and there I step into the heat, tourists, climbers and warning signs everywhere. *Risk of heart stroke and death is higher than normal*. I feel I've successfully lost my bearings, so I take off into the mountains like a modern day Alice, looking for them. I pace past cacti and flowers, overly-polite strangers and their dogs, but all I find in the scorch of the sun are hikers, climbers and bright red rocks.

After Alice

The world is wrecked, undergrown  
And leaves are black from the great steel ball  
Coming, soon to crash.

Let me take this air,  
This wakeful forgetting  
And kick it to the deepest outer space  
Where aliens watch the news.

I see strange things  
Through this sleep—  
Picked pansies  
And uneaten pizzas, hot from the oven  
Withered, baking in the street.  
A giant curved bell  
Measures where I am.  
Where are my characters?  
Where is she and he?

He is my words, beautiful words—  
A man I wrote about, a good man  
For poetry. He's since become askew,  
Jaundiced, fat bloated ankles  
From drinking.

A giant curved bell, uncracked,  
Hovers like a blimp.  
Where I am.  
There is she  
And he.

She was once the ingenue, a word a poem girl.  
Now she only dreams of size zero jeans  
And what numbs, what stops the weeds.  
These jeans grow backwards  
Into mini legs and tight pockets.

She is a pinpoint,  
Watches T.V. with her mother.  
It's a cool autumn evening,  
Dead leaves raked in piles.  
Her mother is fat, the girl watches  
Each lump when she climbs the stairs.  
The screen turns to snow, ready

To be burned out  
Like this skin.

Her house, his bar  
Are somewhere near the wrecking ball.  
They're tipping heads, a perfect view,  
No longer responsible  
For the giant curved bell  
That never rings.

## Days Of 2004 Part 2

I still drive out to Red Rock Canyon and the tourists are still there but now they sweat more, even for March. Jesus sits in the passenger seat instead of my Bible; He sweats too. We have excellent talks. I ask Him about the movie they made where He died, but I usually have a place to be so we turn around after the five-dollar scenic drive and head towards the city. The Strip shines through the holes in His hands, making sunsets, paintings and undeniable light then when I want to see it. These days when I dream I see the actor, not God, I try to shield His eyes from open containers and people who've grown sad. My heart jumps without a rhythm. He reminds me to keep driving.

## Winter In Him

I whip the corner of an old Delaware winding road  
And a hobgoblin huddles, a bundle  
Of scarves and hair—  
A hairshirt,  
By the guardrail.

I slam on the brakes, leave the car with a door open,  
Windows down  
And he's there.  
I ask him why he looks so—  
*I'm afraid the world is ending, says he, and it will keep  
On ending as long as there's T.V. Men no longer have ears.*

He shakes for some long answer, for winter, for  
In death (the way this minute has now died) is a new  
Hobgoblin and me, and still sweet  
Other winters.  
He tells me how nothing completes him  
Then the sun peaks for a brief now,  
And he asks, *why can't we shake these seasons?*

## God Comes Out Of A Glove

Because the minister took our money  
And was accused of 'misconduct',  
My church is dead.  
Because my church is dead  
It lives on the ceiling,  
Cozies me up in soft covers. I breathe.  
Our dark silhouettes stand  
In winter stucco and sing; outside the snow  
Makes it silent. The weather is a pin  
On a life map. My coordinates are here  
And here.

Behind the dream gates, ice turns  
To water, red river. I see a cruise ship  
With seven decks, a funeral on top,  
And the flock is decked  
In its summer lounge fatigues—  
Yellows, pinks and beautiful greens.  
Their clothes match the sky.  
I see my reverends  
In long black gowns  
With bright blue collars.  
They are like pillars, towering  
Spilling a weight  
Smiling the smiles  
That warmed me once  
That long Delaware winter,  
The one tied up with a winding road  
That wound  
In the dark, and the trees have white arms.  
The road heads straight for our swerving,  
Our ghosts.

A girl who'd been in my body once  
Is in the casket.  
She was soft.  
She had faith the size of big invisible air,  
Cellulite on the backs of her thighs  
And pretty brown eyes.

I remember her like bright purple  
Flowers growing in another country,  
Like Jesus's daughter, or maybe  
Even his wife. Such pretty girls.

There is so much  
Dancing, an absence of pantyhose,  
And the great bearded minister  
Somebody accused of misconduct,  
It seems it is hers, and our  
Reconversion, like the journey  
Of a Mariner, of life in death,  
And death in life.

BETWEEN SPEAK

*It's your nose that's tired, a person often talks too much when he thinks he knows a  
great deal.  
Lewis Carroll*

Kick

We are the most fragile  
Flowers.

Then  
The taking

Is fertilizer, like an addiction  
Like caffeine,  
But we kick habits to the curb every day

A million people in a long straight line  
With our habits before us

The sun hides behind the sky, a giant cloud  
We pump each other up with back slaps  
And butt slaps  
And in a moment we will kick  
But just before becomes the wet rain  
Of our gastrointestinal tracts  
Where so much loathing resides.

A deep breathing,  
None of us knows what will really hurt  
A long line of kickers, our starving organs  
And overworked adrenal glands  
Our rapid hearts and old livers  
We haven't kicked yet.

And then we become like air.

Dance Of The Paintball Park Part 2

*Upon falling into delusion during a paintball game*

Ranger staggers behind the pack  
Sporting new battle wounds.  
One on the forehead,  
Three on his back.

He is the last to loom the line  
On which my eyes,  
My heart  
Have fallen.  
He lets out a few brute grunts,  
Slings the sweat from his hair.

I am a an innocent civilian  
Who wants nothing more  
Than to wet the red welts on his body.  
He marches off with the troops to Beirut.  
I follow close, watching the young skin  
On his neck.  
I hide in an abandoned helicopter,  
Wincing every time I hear a gun shot  
And praying to the paintball gods  
That I won't be found  
Or that I might become his prisoner.

### Third Love

You did me in.

It was the brushfire (caught me off guard

Like a walrus in this poem),

Not that you were looking at other girls.

You shook me to lucid dreams (clear as your

Very tan skin and skinny limbs).

*Other girls:* words trampling over my name

In your head, a stampede of white horses that whip

Through the woods with an attitude, a swift galloping hand.

Shuts me up, don't it?

Dreaming Is A Fish (Dive)

*He was part of my dream, of course, but then I was part of his dream, too.*  
*Lewis Carroll*

My bed is a deep seat.  
Candles smoke thin, phantoms  
Without even trying  
And I meet the boy  
As I go diving.

Strangest shade of green is he.  
Stuck between my ears—he swims,  
A merman with legs twining  
In green waterweed.  
I know his face,  
The small frame glasses  
And eyes that stickle me;  
Then out of nowhere  
Bristly bed wakes my brain,  
Pillows pummel my ponytail.

I'm catapulted into the living room.  
It wracks my forehead from the inside, but tender;  
The leftover sea spreads its fingers.  
I see him, a long born thread in the 7am  
And my notion of last summer,  
My refusal,  
Makes me pathetic, unmoved  
But a fish and in something  
Like love.

Turn

My friend pricks me with news of losing his virginity;  
It leaves a dull imprint on my skin.  
He's the one I watched shine about religion,  
His summer socks light in sun.

That was when California clogged my sneakers  
And I became a wild girl, my head in a tub.  
He showed me his Jesus bumper sticker,  
I showed him different ways to drink.

I fall now on the thermals of autumn,  
Groping for sense in a sex life being born.  
It bore itself before its time  
And my own time is waning, it seems.

These thoughts are trimmed in a wilderness,  
Cacti void of thorns.  
I look sideways to that Jesus,  
The one he threw away,  
The one I'll pick up later  
In the story,  
The one I'll throw away.  
It's darker, starlight turned  
Off. It's when I realize  
More than leaves will change.

## Talk of the Wire

My mother bought a puppy to replace me first  
Because I left early.  
Then I humped the Bible  
To replace her.  
He tries to eat the phone with his dog mouth  
As I say, *hey cutie pie,*  
*I love you.*

*We thought your brother was becoming a recluse  
But he got drunk off tequila with some girls  
In his dorm room last night, thank God.*  
My ear ducks beneath the words  
As to avoid a popped a head nerve  
From the other side  
Of the country.

My brother has become intellectual.  
Most nights he falls asleep in his cubicle,  
Head hitting wood, in search of the truth.  
Books pile on  
Books.  
Consider immersion.

*You got baptized? Congratulations.*  
*What are you now, Lisa the Baptist?*  
I pick toenails to stumps.

Books pile on  
Books; stacking.  
Asymmetrical and  
Unavoidable.  
Two very different leaps  
Of faith.

## Recovery

My words for you are indistinct oranges—  
Peelings of a girl,  
The juicy maroon outline of a boy.

It was a T.V. show that finally cut your bones.  
You saw your life in browning bits  
But came back  
Full ellipse.

Now your dreams are decomposing fields—  
Dancer alcoholic lover  
In gargantuan amounts,  
Of countless men.

Now the drugs that staged an intervention  
In your head are making a place  
In the guts of your groin.

Now you are impaled with the upchuck  
Of all your projects, frozen and flavored  
On a stick and the funky colored light  
You hurled olive rust and anguish,  
Ambition and dust  
And made the new world.

## The Go-Go Dancer Watches Me

Low red light in a lounge.  
Her legs crisscross  
In smoky space table  
*Tight*, watching.

My feet snug *step*  
In perfect form *bounce*  
Thrill hip in six inch  
Platform boots,

Crusting the corner  
I pop, read with heavy eyes  
Midnight, curve a beat, pull her  
To me in waves.

Eyelids unfastened, I am  
*Awake*.

Haze drizzles drinkfoam,  
Then everyone's fingers become  
Monochrome.

## Cut

I found a pair of silver scissors  
In my stocking this Christmas.  
My mother had finally come to terms  
With the incessant lock chopping  
Because it came natural  
And my hair looked good.

We'd moved up, me and Mom,  
A long way from the first incident.  
I remember her face, the color of an unripe plum  
Because I'd used the kitchen scissors with the orange rim,  
The ones she used to cut open pre-packaged chicken breasts  
Before dinner.  
I had a gift for snipping.  
I'd come out of the bathroom,  
Brown chunks and hairforks  
Sprawling the floor,  
The ones she sucked up  
With a vacuum, a scowl.

Then the skinny guy with cornrows and medical gloves  
Searched my bag at the airport last week.  
He plunged into the trash, make up and old batteries,  
Emerged from the wreckage  
And held a pair of skinny scissors to the light.

## Nightlight Hallucination

We pass through a gray street, lamps cast this blur  
In the air. Fog smokes the road. I am a foreign girl,  
Stopped by new beauty. My sleepy eyes watch  
As the car paves cobblestone, painting my breath white  
On the way home from a weekend climbing trip,  
The middle of a long Welsh winter.

A lone cab rocks in front of us, draws ripples in time tonight.  
It looks like no one is driving, but my brain still thinks  
With the wrong side this side of the ocean.  
Along a stretch of road my thoughts bend like this  
Winding Welsh city, green lights and clothes shops  
Closed in a weather blip that bites deep, opening in folds.

We stop at a pub for food, midnight cold.  
I walk the solid echo of my steps, turn a corner  
And you are there, an apparition. A star jolts light.  
We both see it, as if I really see you.

It doesn't matter; I know it in your nose bent funny,  
In your thin legs stirring the street.  
I put a top hat on your head because I feel it take  
Shape in my hand. You find a cane near the gutter.  
Past the closed shops, yellow lights dimming in the blip  
That bites coldest, we walk with one another.

## Air Thoughts

I don't know what you are  
So in the spirit of The Know,  
My brain says *try a plane*.  
Good thing I'm already in flight,  
Suspended in cloud on a thick,  
Warm night.

Strange memories comes out  
From behind the upright seat  
And locked tray-table—  
How my dad would scare me  
Into getting clean.  
*Lisa, if you don't take a bath,  
Tomatoes will grow out  
Of your butt.*  
And I believed.  
It's not that I was four,  
But full of faith.

It's the same with you.  
How my head gives me tips  
For getting over The Yoga Instructor.  
*Lisa, if you don't get under this one,  
You'll never get over the you-know-what.*  
(It knows not to mention his name  
More than once, that tiger, that dream,  
That silliest rascal of a love).

It's not that I'm a sucker,  
But full of faith.  
I've got some of it  
In you, my friend, and I'm prying it out  
With large pliers.  
Forgive me if I leave a mark,  
I'm just not sure where it's lodged—  
In your heart, your mind,  
Or in your private parts.  
Either way, I'm a princess  
In the digital age  
And you make me happily abbreviate  
My roundabout words  
In the form of a text message.

From this crazy height,

The cities look like a great grid,  
Christmas ornaments  
Glowed and glued in yellows  
And blues, the canyons singed  
With red like the shapes  
I see on your sexy bald head.  
There is no life up here  
But still I can think  
Of what you are, what's this thing  
Between us.  
I feel less awkward  
When the plane goes down,  
And I think of what you are,  
What we'll both soon be—  
My lonely narration  
Or a sweet third person  
On the great wide ground.

## Air Thoughts Part 2

I left you at the airport  
To go your merry way  
And we're both blessed  
To roll like this.  
Still it's very empty  
Without you.  
It feels like a great wide hall.  
Like a backwards book,  
You live on the flipside.  
You left me in Vegas,  
First day of fall.

I still haven't figured out  
Why love (dare I say it)  
Feels like soil on a cold day—  
Refrigeration, a cave  
Full of pillows  
And a solid heart,  
Wavy brown ground—  
Sure I could sift right through  
And no one would ever find me.

I never told you  
That once I was sure  
I'd die without  
Ever having sex again,  
And to me  
That was death.  
It seemed all there was—  
It seemed bodies and thought  
And God,  
Roadkill. It'd all come down  
To this.

So life is not the perfect tuna melt  
Or a pickle—but I'm in it,  
Holding a big old bottle  
Of retrospect.  
It's all very retro—  
What I cannot rekindle  
Or come out and say.  
Everything has opened—

And this day,

The crickets chirping in my room  
To sing me to sleep  
To sing me—I'm eighth notes and many  
Crescendos,  
Has never been lonelier  
Because this day has never been  
Till today.

## To The Angry Boys

Let me ease over road, a ripple in this poem.  
A song leaves compost in the car—  
Old watches, sour smells and rubber bands for my hair.

I stop at a light, watch four boys clad in black cross the street.  
I smile. They have short shaggy haircuts and small hands.  
They don't know my world, my song inside, they don't hear  
The score I've picked out for their lives.

It makes their walk a dark beauty  
While blue from the speakers bleeds into the sky—a reminder,  
A freeway onramp, the windows open, wind tickles my ears.  
My eyes feel like dropping from this gap between us.  
I smile again, and think,  
We all do something to the world.

The boys lose their hearts to apathy  
Spread over streets, warm and cold and dying—  
While a toothmarked pencil, or hometown snowy trees  
In thin winter sun is close, better, more  
Ungeneral.

Their cheeks make me imaginary.  
My own grown body suddenly stands at a lectern in heaven's stadium,  
Maximum capacity: a world of angry boys.

I tell them:

A smile has proved to be good.  
It changes things, and nothing makes  
A difference till it's real. But don't be fooled.  
Dreams are just as near, and easily converted,  
Made solid by a clumsy walk. Go on when you can't,  
The wrong way in the dance. An endless feeling of desert,  
Every *why*. I tell you—just dancing is dancing just fine.  
And there are sounds in the world worth hearing: clattering plates,  
The tires of my car heavy on the street. I know what you think—  
No thing that I do will be, and it's better to wait for tomorrow.  
Tomorrow is a dream so to speak.

They aren't listening.  
Anyway, it doesn't matter.  
I too dream of the things I'll be  
Tomorrow.

In my dreams  
I'm always grand.

I step down from the lectern and into my car.  
Their faces fall outside my windshield and I watch  
While the leftover seeps through car metal, burning my thighs.

I take this better and worse—together.  
All bells ring and stop,  
Because this is how the world works:  
Nobody knows what they've got.

I drown deep in a movement.

It's like this:  
When I'm in it,  
I feel so sad

And worked

And still.

Ditching Dance In Winter

*Delaware, 1997*

All of the turns I know—I wind  
With the road, tree trunks white  
With headlight,  
Blue cloud above becoming  
Night in Delaware December—  
Cold to sweat.

I have one cigarette before ballet,  
The window cracked open an inch.  
This is my fit—outside of boys, girls,  
Middle of a black floor, foot and thigh.

It's more than the dry inside  
Of a black leotard and uncrunched slippers.  
Tonight I am more than plea:  
I am a hole at the barre.

My hair's not melted tonight,  
So into bobby pins I drink  
Into nothing in a spot deemed Laser's Woods  
Named after Mike Laser, 6'4", with a big nose  
And a big cause, the biggest in high school—  
To get us drunk on a weekday.

The moon bathes our bottles in blue.  
I have good friends, the kind you never have.  
We sit hunched around a fire, other dancers already  
In allegro, my shivering skin  
Mellowed in that blue blue moon.  
Four Honey Browns die on the ground.  
Later I'm found chucking up chunks of my dinner  
Near the white pick up truck where I'll sleep  
In transit, a never ending state of Alice,  
When Tylenol and sleep don't do a thing.

I wake up the next day feeling I've missed it.  
I'm spinning on grass, leaping building to building  
In a dream.

## Personal Revival

My psychiatrist asks me  
Why I have such dark circles  
Under my eyes.

I can tell he expects answers—  
Drugs, perhaps. Like uppers.  
Maybe lack of sleep, whatever haunts my dreams.  
Maybe I stopped eating.  
But I stopped, you see, I stopped doing these things.

It's just genetics, doctor. But don't be alarmed,  
Please, I've already purchased  
The newest and greatest miracle cream.

At first I'm deeply offended,  
But then I know—He sat in the big brown chair  
Just today, to send me a message from God.  
He said it's time to take action, young writer,  
It's time. The dimlight ups a notch out the window,  
The laziest afternoon I've ever seen.

Surely I'm not getting older.  
Just the other day, a big fat woman  
Looked me up and down and said,  
You're too young to be an English teacher.

These dark circles are

Little Delawares, the home I hold to

They are the dark bones of a church  
That stopped in its churching;  
How religion is still sweet.

These bones are rotting under my eyes, silent beams,  
Scaffolding of what was my present.  
How did it escape me?  
Nothing a cream can't fix.

Then I leave his office, walk along the road with my big heart beating.  
A little girl stops and says, what do you want to be  
When you grow up?  
A writer, I say.  
Her mouth drops open wide.

She says, your poetry's what's missing;  
We've all become like bones.  
My mouth drops open wide.

If I could say this to the doctor,  
Oh how I'd be satisfied.

Between Speak

*At the Ritz*

I'm grinning like a walrus  
In the dark,  
Spitting on Hollywood,  
All its counterparts.

My little brother, the philosopher  
Almost sheds a tear that almost wets  
His hair gone shaggy. His body pudged up  
And went soft from too much library time.  
I guess I'm in between religion and God,  
In love with whatever made my brother  
So smart.

Pepper falls from the screen in large shards,  
Erases humanness from the room  
With some scarlet curtains.  
It's all rehearsed.  
Still it moves him and this  
Moves my nerves,  
We strain necks (third row runs  
In the family) to consider  
A father's wrinkled face  
With pores like pepper shards  
And he is dying.

My brother worms around,  
Taken by a screenplay.  
The pepper makes him sneeze.  
Then comes a quiet buzz in my cornea  
Because he's almost crying  
And all the while I'm grinning  
Like a Cheshire cat, sitting in the dark,  
Spitting on all he holds as holy,  
The world's little counterparts.  
It's much too dark  
For this three-quarter faith.

The two of us are caught in a theatre,  
Held by an empty cup that molds a plastic hole  
Between our seats.  
And in this clutch we really feel a little.  
And in this clutch we don't belong at all.  
Brought closer, caught up without a word,

We both know what the other believes  
But cannot hold.

The father dies;  
We drive home.

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