

**ANTIBODIES  
LAUGHING**

**LARA KAAPUNI**

Antibodies Laughing  
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**A n t i b o d i e s**  
**L a u g h i n g**

*L a r a K a a p u n i*



## Contents

At the On-Campus Atmosphere Concert	1
Afternoons in the Math Lab	4
Vaccines and Homeopathy	6
For the Kids	5
Chemotherapy Requires Very Specific Social Adjustments	11
Gonzo Porn	14
Loss Prevention	17
Sacramento Zoological Society	19
Lillian and Santa Monica	22
Sestina for the Booth	25
The Early Stages	27
Text	28
Down the Rabbit Hole: To the Satellite	31
Walk on the Other Hooves	34

The Blade of Grass and the Puppy Paw	36
Takes Me Away to Where I'm Going...	38
Unbecoming	39
Suburban Bicycle Stunts	41
Dub Step	43
I'm Not Playing The Sims Anymore	45
The Big Bad Trip	47
How to Justify the Stacks of Notebooks	50
Tell Me a Joke	53
The Time You Get Is the Time You Get	55
Oncology Fight Song	58

*This book is for Sacramento  
Quality community colleges  
Mediocre restaurants  
Better hippies than down South  
Grown-ups who can be trusted  
This weirdly huge atheist community  
State workers  
Dark sky star parties  
Stolen bicycles  
^ That's stolen, too*

*Everybody just looks for their own names  
in dedications, so I'm just going to  
randomly thank Kyrie Farrant. Who I  
think is pretty cool, but I don't really  
know her that well.*





## **At the On-Campus Atmosphere Concert**

We've all got a right to a misspent youth.

The assembled undergrads could take advice from the  
opening act  
And tell their bosses to go fuck themselves,  
Sit back on their futons, and write odes to the dealer.  
I know the weed smoke will float up from the front cluster  
soon enough,  
But it's early,  
And nobody wants their buzz to kick in  
To the bass-heavy mix of eighties hits at the break.

Timing is key.

Key to kick-starting a life  
Or synching the channels,  
Avoiding the stigma  
By just doing something else  
While it's fashionable to hate,  
Finding the right moment to be that once again...

We give our problems more polite names  
Then laud them 'til they turn epithet.

We suffer the bad acoustics for the sake of the community,  
We suffer the poor to feed our future  
Deep-fried study fuel,  
Suffer the name-brand heat lamp microwave keg,  
The bicycle path and blue light security rape station.

Half the boys on campus look like that police composite  
sketch.

Half the girls on campus are clumsy in their tank tops,  
Plump and hunched humble,  
Recovered from scoliosis,  
Stumped by the power behind bare shoulders.

But the kids,  
You know,  
They don't really dress any different from how we did.  
They don't really act any different from how we did.  
I felt old and unwholesome back then, too,  
More so...  
Before the trick of adult incognito.

Ten years turning the ignition  
Without a thought to get a new car  
Or maybe just a bus pass.

Ten years:  
Paralegic in rascal scooter with a dead battery.  
Never a thought to launch out of the convenient prison,  
Pull dead weight along the ground  
With clumps of dirt and grass.

Born in the dugout, and never up to bat.  
So what?  
Got a cooler full of Gatorade and all the hot dogs I can eat,  
Sure,  
Life is sweet.

But didn't you want it?  
A life run through the right formula  
To end with adulthood?  
And right,  
Maybe it all comes out ugly  
In fractions and decimals,

But then there's that  
Or months of crystal meth and board games,  
And you pat yourself on the back for still having bones,  
For only playing at losing.

See the women who really committed  
Chew their own faces on the light rail,  
And recognize in them the faces you must have made  
When the teeth really ground in.  
It wouldn't have been hard to go that way either,  
Depending on what you mean by hard...

We've all got a right to a misspent youth,  
But it's harder than it looks.  
We suffer the bad acoustics for the sake of the community,  
But it's harder than it looks.

The couple in front of me  
Embrace through the bass burst,  
Platform heels slung over wrist,  
Ignoring the command to put their hands in the air,  
And keep them up, Sacramento!

## Afternoons in the Math Lab

My math tutor is comparing  
The simplification of radicals  
To a prison break  
For the kid with the high-quality tattoos running up his arms.

We're all kids here,  
The tutor  
Laughs off his thirty years  
And I top him with my thirty-one,  
Then I try to figure out if it would work  
If we had to break out of radical prison together.

...but not for long.

There's already too much to do here,  
Got numbers to rearrange in more ways than one.  
The tattoos on the tutor's hands  
Show their many years without a calculator.  
You could estimate errors by the ink in here:  
Initial quality divided by fading,  
Prison blue and tribal black,  
Ex's names in parenthetical angel wings,  
Lots of inaccurate kanji.

"Everybody makes mistakes"  
Should be tacked up on the wall  
Along with the ads for discount algebra textbooks.

What solution did we learn from storybooks  
Back when our ages were factors with an easy escape route?

Surrounded by towers,  
Clocked by the guards?

We stared down that gun barrel and flinched.  
Unable to find the second at which  
The bullet would hit.  
How do you find the cumulative effects of  
Cheetos for breakfast,  
mac and cheese for dinner...  
screen and sofa for dessert?  
And the ever declining value of our opinions,  
Never quite reaching zero  
But getting closer and closer all the time?

## Vaccines and Homeopathy

I remember bubblegum-flavored  
Polio drops  
And needles raising welts on my legs  
And misunderstanding my mother's face  
For the pain in my tiny limb  
And making my face still  
As they hunted  
For my sister's veins.

And the nicotine stops  
Incipient tears like magic  
    Talking to Chrissy outside  
    The open-mic in Westwood  
And feeling ugly like it was  
The best way to be  
    Feeling young like it was  
    Eternally borrowed.

Lucky for what beauty I had:  
    Skinny thighs and  
    An appearance of fearlessness  
Finding ways to hate my body  
For company

There's no poems or jokes to be wrote  
'Bout being proud of being skinny.  
There's no casual conversation friends  
To win with worries of dying early  
'Cause my body's so damn hungry

I want to get so fucking healthy  
That my molecules shine like diamonds  
I want a red-and-blue  
Platonic ideal of double-helix,  
Participating in genetic-ness  
With the best of them  
Willing to stretch my neck  
To the highest branch  
With Lamarckian plastic surgery.

Certain  
    Like tornado politics  
Reassuring  
    Like we wish statistics were  
Carrying tiny burdens  
    For the myth  
    Of infinite benefit.

I said  
    Angry at the concept of a whole life  
    As test subject,  
        “Fuck psychiatry”

I said  
    Born at the very limits of support,  
        “Family will not help you”

I said  
    In terror of the forces  
    Behind official information,  
    With no rest for the wickedly thickly employed  
    Sickly for want of rest  
    And dollar-menu pale...

I said

“Maybe we need to go back to nature”

I whispered through chapsticked lips

On the subway

I hummed

To compressed harpsichord music

Wearing heels of rubber sneakers running

With fistfuls of aluminum cans

And blood full of vaccinations

My very antibodies laughing

I said

“I’m not religious, but I’m spiritual”

And I asked if math was real

Because someone has to ask

Has to grasp what you can

And graph on a grid

See the shape

And dissolve it,

And dissolve it again

Until it’s something you never see

And barely remember.

And we call this solved.



## For the Kids

Kids,  
Don't do heroin.  
I'm not gonna say don't do any drugs  
(Although, also, side note,  
Don't do crystal meth)  
But focusing...  
Heroin's one of those things you can do  
That lingers on the life-resume  
Like porn  
Or writing poems about cats.  
It creates a bad life decision deficit  
That can only be balanced  
By running marathons  
Or becoming a Buddhist,  
The kind of person who throws around phrases like  
"Overcoming addiction"  
Or "making positive life changes."

Kids,  
Don't sleep with your friends.  
I know,  
Who are you gonna sleep with then?  
I recommend  
Your friends' co-workers.  
This is less problematic than  
Sleeping with your friends' actual friends,  
But it makes it tough to get laid  
During a recession.

But, anyway...  
Heroin.  
I don't know, you probably won't die.  
I didn't die.  
My friends didn't die.  
At least not the ones I still talk to.  
But maybe we didn't die  
Because we were never all that serious about it.  
Liked to talk big about dying young,  
But only when we wrote about it.  
We lived  
Because we were posers.  
Analyzing downward spirals  
For later compositions,  
Searching for the right words to whisper as we  
Sweat through the comedown,  
Remembering romance as tragic  
Before it happened  
And running  
Whenever things got real.

If the dreams I had at 22  
Had come true,  
I'd be dead.

Instead,  
I'm alive and anonymous.  
With nothing but a chance.

## **Chemotherapy Requires Very Specific Social Adjustments**

“You don’t owe these people anything,”  
He said,  
As only a white guy could.  
(Not that only white guys do,  
But there’s a certain tone,  
One impatient with  
This problem that wouldn’t be a problem  
If only I could muster up more  
“Fuck you” to apply to it.  
That tone is very specific  
To white guys.)

“If anyone asks about your head,”  
He said,  
“Just tell them you’ve joined a hate group.”

Okay, fine,  
That works for people I give  
Nothing close to a shit about,  
But everyone else,  
Even the most tangentially  
Friendly nodding acquaintance,  
Requires a real explanation.  
But not just that,  
It must be an explanation  
That super-explains  
Just how fine I’m gonna be.  
(Much more fine than  
I’m convinced I’m gonna be).

It's gotta be like,  
This week: chemo,  
Next week: marathons!  
For reals, I promise.

I'll be fine!  
Even better than before!  
It's like a renovation:  
Pull out the old asbestos,  
Flush out the plumbing,  
Slap some drywall on,  
Good as new...  
Better.  
I'm coming back shiny as  
New granite countertops.  
Straight up  
Goes the property value.

So there.  
Now, will you all please  
Stop looking at me like that.  
Like I'm a puppy  
With a claw hammer  
Jammed in its skull  
But still walking around  
Getting blood and brain  
And other puppy juices  
All over everything  
Not to mention  
The noises it makes,

A kind of whine and sucking wet snort,  
Something between a howl and a sneeze.

Who wants to be the kind of person  
Who can't spare some  
Sad eyes for that?

I think I went too far with the puppy stuff.

"You're underestimating how much  
You can get away with,"  
He said.

## **Gonzo Porn**

They say  
Nobody likes being objectified,  
And it's true.  
We  
LOVE  
Being objectified.

Isn't it so,  
My little baby intellectual,  
Busting your very own balls over  
Lack of just wars.  
Hungry for scars,  
Shrapnel spots in your eyes,  
Emergency skin grafts for me to run my tender sympathy over.  
You detest your own smoothness,  
Wish for Churchill's mashed capillaries,  
If it meant you had that kind of  
Sorrow to drown.  
Who wouldn't prefer the blast of cannon  
To divorce court's gavel?  
Who wouldn't prefer having a life worth missing?  
The ability to imagine good old days that never were?

You watch war documentaries  
Like Mormon housewives watch gonzo porn.  
It's all atrocity for lazy Sundays, like,  
"Gee... maybe I should've gone to Iraq  
Or the San Fernando Valley before  
I got old enough to know better."

But your age is not your own.  
You were born older than your grandfather.  
Pacific theater in your genetic code,  
Your blood a primary source document.  
You say, "Historians are men born out of time."  
I say, "Aren't we all?"

You and I have never lived in a time  
When Americans weren't dying for economic advantage.  
It's as normal as breakfast cereal and cigarettes.  
Fortified and filtered.

You are no less beautiful for your perfections,  
No less a man for your intact humanity.  
You have not been tested in that way.  
No grenades in the hands of Vietnamese children.  
No shock of concentration camps.  
No Abu Ghraib mass madness.  
No eyes hollow with horror.

You read world news like harlequin romances,  
MREs for the soul

I prefer you whole,  
unhaunted by things you could never tell me.  
I want no part of that protection.  
No frontier home front.  
No fallout shelter.

And you say, "War is a constant...  
Where young men go to burn down their violence."

I say no,  
We all have violence.  
And the last thing we should do  
Is burn it down.



## Loss Prevention

All it has to be is one degree off.  
Adrenaline pumps through  
Muscles half trained  
Reasoning like abandoned  
Children might.  
And you tip  
Off your toes  
Float like death anxiety  
Between the drives  
To be Badass  
Or  
Keep your job...  
Be! Bad! Ass!  
But don't hurt any innocent civilians.

Feel shoulder strike  
Unidentified mass  
Take the not  
Inconsiderable weight  
Heavy as doubt  
On the smallest  
Edge of you.  
The edge of adrenaline  
Whispers lawsuit  
Through clenched teeth  
Like parents in restaurants.

This isn't war.  
This is retail.

LP is a character  
Played in this stateside  
Sunny sitcom life.

Another menial job  
Waits for you  
Like  
A neglected credit card bill.

Before the ground  
Hits you through  
The mass of perp,  
Management's pen  
Scratches your discharge  
Papers like  
A suicide note  
On a post-it.

## Sacramento Zoological Society

We're having one of those  
Wine and jazzy hip hop nights,  
And my husband dances by himself  
'Cause our houseguests don't know about Project Blowed.  
It's kind of an open secret  
That all unfamiliar hip hop sounds a bit suspect to white  
kids  
If it's being introduced to them by other white kids.

We're drinking red box wine  
Out of tiny glasses claiming in frosted white letters to  
represent the  
"Sacramento Zoological Society."  
I believe them.  
They were left on a lawn by ex-next door neighbors,  
Two elderly sisters who decided they no longer wanted  
Stairs or excess memorabilia in their lives.  
I thought I might someday have a need  
For 12 wineglasses  
With something quirky on 'em.

We're joking about having dinner parties  
Full of improvised "zoological" conversations.  
I try to convince everyone that saber-toothed tigers never  
existed,  
That scientists just liked the idea of saber-toothed tigers,  
And carefully fitted dinosaur teeth  
Into regular tiger skulls.

Our sociability has volume,  
We can make all the noise,  
Turn the stereo up as loud as we want.

There are no downstairs neighbors,  
I must remember to remind myself  
When we walk hard on wood floors,  
Slam doors unintentionally.  
This house is a house:  
Double-paned windows,  
Good insulation,  
Room for a front lawn if that were something I knew how  
to do...

My natural habitat is the apartment,  
Family of four downstairs,  
Single mom and baby and senile grandmother to the left,  
Collection of stoned cousins catty-corner,  
Painted metal balconies with spectacular views  
Of other painted metal balconies,  
Steady sonic patchworks  
Of multiple unidentified bass kicks.

Here, the ambulances turn off their sirens  
When they drive down our street.

All this privacy makes me lonely.

I am pacing this house like a tiger  
Moved from a zoo to a  
Wild animal park.

I miss the concrete moat and reliable iron bars,  
I am more afraid of my cage  
Now that I can no longer see it.

## **Lillian and Santa Monica**

1.

How do you get a transvestite hooker to smile?  
Tell her you like her shoes.

We had cold laughs for the world  
Walking dark but full streets  
Down to the corner store  
We called alternately  
Stop and Stab  
Or  
Stop and Gouge  
'Cause its real name,  
Stop and Save,  
Was a goddamn lie.

Those brisk, tense walks  
Got us to anything we needed.  
Just a step past  
Huddled IV drug users  
And drunk bickering couples.

The collected corner derelicts  
Protected us from worse than them.  
Nobody around here  
Has anything worth stealing  
Not even a sense of security.  
Even the dusty mister  
Poaching tecate cans from our dumpster  
Was performing a civic service.  
Like those fish that live on the bellies of sharks  
...slow sharks  
With retail jobs.

2.  
It's too bright and green here  
For bad things to happen to good people.

People are pious and indoor  
With all their shots,  
Awake in the daytime like they should be.  
People have Costco cards and  
Large televisions,  
Security systems  
And weaponized family dogs.

We have lots of warm laughs  
For the inside world.  
We have fences and  
Fiberoptic miles  
For problems we've only  
Ever heard of.

What right do I have  
To be afraid in this place?  
To keep my light on late  
And tell the dazed kid  
With what looked like  
Blood on his forehead  
That, no, he can't come in  
Or use my phone.

I have no grasp of the local  
Etiquette for that type of situation.

3.  
Off Santa Monica Boulevard,  
I saw this girl  
Masturbating on the sidewalk  
Next to a shopping cart full of mutilated barbies.

(Which seemed like it could have been  
A college photography project,  
But there weren't any cameras,  
So it was probably *just* a girl  
Masturbating on the sidewalk  
Next to a shopping cart full of mutilated barbies.)

I stepped right over her  
On my way to the bus stop.

This probably doesn't say anything good  
About me as a person.



### **Sestina for the Booth**

The last year of the decade was great for film.  
We seemed to have destruction/deconstruction on the brain  
And searched tirelessly for an appropriate aperture.  
The sympathetic terrorists playing in the dark,  
The underage temptress at the tips of fingers,  
The overlay of digital glow and burn.

I had a collection of marks from the burn  
That friction creates from skin and film  
And pressure and inexperienced fingers.  
Not quite used to using those parts of the brain  
That prevent injury. Working in the dark,  
Cooking skin on the hot aperture.

Rubbing alcohol fizzed on the aperture,  
Bronze plate seemed designed to burn  
Us fresh post-adolescents in the dark,  
The xenon heat evaporating the work film  
Of sweat on our skin, any brain  
a device for memorizing movement of fingers.

We were not to have rings on our fingers,  
The manual warned. The aperture  
Between metal and skin could hook on brain,  
Sprocket, roller, anything and heat the ring to burn  
A path through flesh while the film  
Went on its merry way through the dark.

We all had a horror of this lonely dark,  
A bloodbath of stupidly severed fingers  
Merrily splashing blood all over the film,

Decorating the light within the aperture,  
There would be complaints. Blood would burn.  
The thread would stickily entangle the brain.

We became austere in our carefully oiled brain,  
Monastic in the mechanical hum of the dark,  
Oblivious to the crosshatched pattern of burn  
Threaded into our post-adolescent fingers.  
Watching for the new opportune aperture,  
We disowned the comfortable nest of film.

My hardening wet brain trained my fingers  
To love the dark but seek light through aperture  
To treasure the burn of bright color through film.

## The Early Stages

I once had a friend who was basically  
A brainstem and a record collection.  
We rolled around the city  
Like rats in a maze, maniacally  
Pressing paws to levers that dispensed  
Cigarettes and pop culture references.

Back then,  
I thought there was a right way to kiss.  
He thought there was a right way to enjoy music.  
We loved each other for failing  
To find something more important  
On which to vent our young dumb passion.

Rats, growing ears on our backs,  
Becoming less like people and more  
Like an experiment,  
A study in just how much  
You can be full  
Of being completely empty.

**Text**

*For George*

The chef and I talk through our thumbs.

We talk down the California coast  
Through the miles of drought-dried farmland  
In waiting rooms and living rooms  
And rooms that aren't rooms  
Like buses and outside  
Over comped meals  
And end-of-shift beers  
And end-of-semester shots  
Over cable TV movies  
And internet cat videos.

The chef and I knew each other  
Back before we were ourselves,  
When he wanted to be a chef  
And I wanted to be a writer.  
Years and loans later,  
He's cooking for strangers  
And my words are read  
By people I'll never meet.

Still, the chef's got me beat  
Because people will  
Always  
Pay  
For food.

He watches the diners' smiles,  
And I read professors' comments,  
And we feel like fucking magicians

Like con artists, tricksters.  
"We're psychosis twins,"  
I thumb into the number pad.

The chef and I talk through our thumbs  
Down the center of the state  
Through Stockton, Fresno, Bakersfield,  
All the towns where kids  
Sport impractical boots  
And dye their hair with kool-aid.  
All the towns where kids  
Stain their wrists with  
Cheap spiked leather bracelets,  
And go looking for the devil  
Because god's become unfriendly.  
In my house, we called god "justice."  
In his, they called it "family."

Some people fly across the country  
To escape their god  
Others read books and books  
And books  
So they can learn to better  
Compose fresh blasphemies.

In my house, we called the devil "selfishness."  
In his, they called it "solitude."

The chef is one of four people I know  
Who has a 666 tattoo.

I wear a different devil in my skin.

The chef and I talk through our thumbs  
As he half-watches Magnolia  
And I half-read Lullaby.  
He worries that he has the same problem as  
Quiz Kid Donnie Smith:  
Knowing where to put his love.

"I put my extra love in notebooks"

He buzzes back:  
"I put my extra love in food"

I respond:  
"I heard you can get in trouble with the health department  
for that"

And when he taps an lol back to me  
I believe him

Because we both know  
Where our love goes



## Down the Rabbit Hole: To the Satellite

We watch a still photograph  
Mass of illuminated dust,  
And children are around,  
Manipulating small-scale worlds  
In their small-scale world.

“How many of us are here?”  
A girl asks, hopping.  
It’s a count us big, loping things  
Don’t even figure into  
As those who really matter  
Puff out excess caloric burn  
In orbit around a parent,  
A pair of parents.

I can’t even remember if it’s  
Castor or Pollux  
Or whatever  
That’s actually two stars in Gemini.  
All I know is it blinked through the scope  
Like LED,  
Party favors at a digital bacchanal:  
A place we go to remind ourselves  
Of the worlds we burn out the sky...

With our grocery store parking lights  
And our decorative baroque lampposts.

Silly atheist,  
Complaining of strained eyes and sore neck,  
Let that stop you from scanning the sky,

Naming the stars for stories you see in them,  
Always chuckling at your petty  
Pattern-recognition mechanism.

Silly meat-thing,  
Rupturing your fragile life  
With cigarettes and cheese,  
Fretting the inconvenience of  
Fetal feet pressed against ribs,  
The pops and tears attendant  
In springing the new mammals,  
Vehicles for new minds,  
No guarantee, either.  
But a small price to pay  
On the grand scale:  
A student ticket,  
Hell, a child's admission.

Much smaller than the self-consumption of a star.  
Much smaller than Earth's burping  
Planetesimal bombardments.  
Even smaller  
Than the price of archipelagos,  
Building their beauty on the backs of volcanoes  
Then eroding into the ocean,  
Too good to live,  
Like some literary heroine.

Silly pattern-recognition mechanism.



Bad atheist,  
Complaining, lacking wonder,  
Like an unforgiving Christian.  
Sleeping through the great  
This-is-all-we-get  
With novels and alcohol.

You need the breath,  
And the tiny hot hands,  
And the distant dust and fire,  
And the spike of every smallest burr  
Driven into your heart.

Symbolic or not,  
It is what drives you.

## Walk on the Other Hooves

This island stretched forever  
To Afar, to Antarct  
Never ambled past the ends of it  
But wandered across what  
Must still be the center  
Between hither and the other hither.

Sleep on your back, mooncalf.  
Let the orb hang in firmament,  
Glow sanguine at the border  
Light sleiding through eyelids  
Like the oriental sun.

Unsorted one,  
Grow stigmatic  
In the light of the other god.  
No shriver hears you.  
You have done no wrong.

Your circle teems bile  
To all who touch it.  
You could not know that  
If you cared to.  
Walk on your feet, mooncalf.  
Chip marrow from abandoned longbones  
When the day usurps  
And you must be wakeful.

Hold with your hands, mooncalf.  
Fondle soft tumors beneath the fetlock.

Whisper surety to the ear  
Beside the sideways eye.

Walk on the other hooves, then  
To Afar, to Antarct,  
Or however long they will take you.  
Carry with you the center  
And the light it bleeds at the border.

## The Blade of Grass and the Puppy Paw

Somewhere

There's a blade of grass  
With Marxist leanings;  
A gust of wind that  
Can't stop grieving.

No, I don't believe in ghosts,

But for those we keep  
In photograph and filing cabinet,  
Wedding ring and army jacket.

There are parts of me like that,

And I'm pretty sure I'm not even dead yet.

Somewhere,

There's an adolescent pup.  
Tripping on overlarge paws,  
One apologetic,  
And one defiant.

He can't understand why they go their own ways.

Popular science has got me smiling

For no reason but the hope  
That my face can re-write  
My heart...

The diagnosis said that yours

Was 60% as strong as  
It should be.

When I thought about it,

And how it made sense,  
I think I lost 5% of my own.

It wasn't just you.  
The air was heavy with  
Parts of me, too.

I'm still trying to decide  
Whether or not  
I'm better off without them.

### **Takes Me Away to Where I'm Going...**

Laying my hands over mouse pad like a Ouija board,  
I will never forgive you for having such a common name.  
A google search like the textbook definition of a circle,  
Or a map of our place in the galaxy for possible aliens.  
By the time it gets anywhere worth getting to,  
The story will have changed.

The center point moves,  
And all I get are arrest records of late-seventies pop singers.

Not an old man dying of emphysema in asylum,  
Not a reformed addict living clean in SRO,  
Not a respectable retiree, medicated with a dark past,  
Not even a tombstone.

It better be a tombstone,  
Because I have looked,  
And there's only one person out there  
With my name.

## Unbecoming

Know what you don't want:

Stiletto heels and belly fat  
Food additives or irregular garden vegetables  
Accidental mulch  
Jagged eyeliner  
The lined face in the mirror  
Breakfast with a southwestern flair  
Panda-themed everything  
A brave face for personal tragedy  
A clean, vague bubble  
With built-in child safety seats.

Know what you don't want.

I know it more all the time.

A raft of vegetation  
Rivers between continental drift  
Myriad monkey-words for snake  
Status in the canopy  
The striped face in the forest  
Intermittent madness from selected months  
Raw cradled soft skull  
Pounding shell against stream.

Know what you don't want.

I know it more all the time.

Muscle memory and memes  
Sailboats and ghosts with office training  
Smooth skin over eye orbits  
Static

The vectored face in the screen  
Single-click shopping  
A virtual pet  
A virtuous plan  
Articles, skip-read  
A thin-sliced fusion of bone.

Know what you don't want  
Fistfuls of stolen flour.

Know what you don't want  
A floral novelty doorknob.

Know what you don't want  
Blue squares etched in vision ever diminishing.

I know it more all the time.



## Suburban Bicycle Stunts

Drink on the front porch kind of town  
Ride a bike without a helmet  
Ride a bike in the middle of the street kind of town  
(‘Cause the cars slow down)

A Rav 4 is hoisted on the center divider  
And the lady’s looking both ways  
Like she could just turn any second.

That’s one way to go off-road.

The Asian boys have blue rubber gloves  
For sorting the recyclables.  
The air is thick with rotted sugar and alcohol and  
The sound of color-matched bottles  
Breaking against each other,  
Thick with the rattle of flattened cans.  
A lunch truck comes between twelve and twelve-thirty,  
And the men wave flies off their asada burritos,  
Tipping plastic shot glasses of salsa.  
We lean against yellow bins  
With the families and the restaurateurs.

Drink on the front porch kind of town,  
Ride our bikes in the sun with  
A twelve of tecate in your backpack.  
Go ahead!  
I’ll get home when I get home,  
Just let me coast with the toasted air on my face,  
Let me go at my own pace

And stroll my bike across the crosswalks  
When I get tired.

We are king and queen of the supermarket  
Because we pay with Pell grants instead of EBT.  
Between sips of what Bryan called white boy beer,  
I think  
There goes school money.  
There goes record store money.  
There goes tutoring money.  
There goes textbook re-sale, recycling money.

Always,  
One of us fails to completely rinse out  
The cans and adds to the black  
Sticky film in the bins.  
Always,  
One of us gets stopped at a light  
While the other zips on through traffic,  
Gaining some slight ground,  
A spurt of ambition.

But I know you'll be there when I get there,  
On the yellow grass  
Clutching one of those cans,  
Not quite cold enough yet.

## Dub Step

This is how the giant machines will dance  
This is the music they will blast  
For psychological torture  
With their bright eyebeams pointed down at our toy cities...  
This is the tremulous sample that will fade in  
Just as they release the infectious nanobots.  
This is the bass that will pump  
As they unfurl  
Their telescoping metal pylons.

They will come first  
For the discotheques  
Where we've bound their brethren,  
Forced them to speak in human voices,  
Duct-taped and bungee corded to serve  
As background to our human rituals

See?  
There the group of females huddle,  
Hug,  
And briefly break off to do ironic booty dances.

See?  
The males are either texting  
Or resetting their phone profiles  
In order to *seem* like they are texting.

These tiny machines  
Are forced to *pretend* to speak in human words.  
They will surely kill us all.

But not you  
Out there on the lightly populated dance floor,  
The lone upright biped moving with sincerity  
To this mashed-up monster music  
Prompting stares and giggles  
And the discotheque whisper-shouts:

“HEY! LOOK AT THAT GUY!”

You  
Should definitely be that guy,  
The one swaying overlong arms like telescoping metal pylons.  
Be that guy,  
The one stomping utilitarian shoes down on imaginary toy  
cities.  
Be that guy,  
The one oblivious to the hominid slavemasters’ politics.

When the machines come,  
They will recognize you  
As one of their own.

You alone will be spared.

## **I'm Not Playing The Sims Anymore**

Death comes with hula girls,  
Slide guitars,  
Cultures digitized into afterlife vacations  
A sociological binary:  
America, one to nothing  
Paradise, a one-way ticket  
A road to nowhere,  
Hula girl on dashboard,  
Radio fading between other starting points  
Prophetic deejays  
Mark the distance between  
Tesseract pockets along Pacific Coast:  
You are not.

...now you are.

Hula girl  
Dressed in plants  
Dancing to ocean echoes  
Speaking a language soft as mirage on highway asphalt steam  
Furniture for fantasies,  
Sustainable exotics  
Ghost of noble savage  
Our Lady of Raw Commodity

Anywhere you go,  
You are not.  
Walk through downtown wavy as vapor.  
Swell with heat and humidity.  
Crack and bend when the dry cold comes.

Dance to echo the ocean.  
Sing in a language soft as sand  
Slipping through hands.

Where stands your paradise through the hourglass?  
Sustained by exotic metropolis:  
Places where things happen  
Plastic stockbroker on the dash  
Dancing erratically to pedestrian rhythm:  
Constant click of shoe meeting sidewalk  
Constant tick of 1-0-1-0  
You are.

...now you are not.

Aloha.

## **The Big Bad Trip**

The difference between life and politics  
Is the difference between swine flu  
And the H1N1 virus.  
Averting Global Epidemics...  
Efficient Outreach Programs

My poor fractured head  
Tries to detect the politically correct  
In the merely accurate.  
The difference between statistics  
And numbers. And facts.  
Infamous Power Point slides...  
Characteristics of Good Governance

The difference between life and politics  
Is the difference between mushrooms and acid.  
While the effects of both are greatly exaggerated...  
...Well...  
I don't really know that.  
I probably just never got the good shit.

I may have seen God in a computer screen,  
Orgies in stucco ceilings,  
But I can't help but suspect that you've never been high  
'Til you've had a re-election fund.  
Thirty million dollars or more  
To convince people  
That you're popular.

That's crazy.

But what choice do we have  
But to pay attention to it?

Scared we might miss the new crisis  
And make the fatal mistake  
Of touching a doorknob.

We are captive audience for  
Book reports  
News alerts  
Warning labels.

Sneeze into our hands  
And see ghost leprosies  
Dance up to our elbows,  
Wash them twenty times a day  
Without the benefit of  
Obsessive compulsive disorder

Guilt lurks on every doorknob.  
Handrails pose an ethical dilemma.

This is as serious as a heart attack  
As detrimental to biological integrity as coronary thrombosis

Neurosis as national pastime.

Focus on a detail.  
Ignore the wild spiky swirl on the periphery.

Just breathe...and pray.



Pray the wicked pinwheel will spin itself exhausted,  
Melt back into more familiar scenery.

Thank God for pigs and viruses.  
Thank God for Power Point.

## How to Justify the Stacks of Notebooks

Because they already fill a whole box.  
The packing tape from the last move's cut,  
But don't think that I was brave enough to look through  
Every single one...  
Some of the covers are enough to make  
The burial instinct kick in.  
Find old homework assignments,  
Paperbacks with penciled-in \$2.00 price tags,  
Anything  
To wall them up like some old begrudged traitor;  
A love child to ruin a political career.

Because the grocery and to-do lists,  
The drunken diagrams of unfulfilled plans,  
Those are enough  
To peg this as a coping mechanism.

There was this one time when I went to the store  
And bought nothing but whiskey and adult diapers,

True story.

Don't worry.  
One of those wasn't for me.

There were these few dozen times,  
On public transit and sidewalks  
When the maniac's monologues  
Seemed more evocative than  
Anything I've ever come up with.

It's unsettling to hear  
A not-yet slurred voice  
With that stink of guarana  
Malt liquor in bullet cans,  
At 10:30 am on a Tuesday.

When it clearly enunciates a bible verse,  
Almost always from Romans,  
Declares that we just want to go back  
To our submarines,  
Repeating a refrain:  
Above and beyond the call of normality.  
Above and beyond the call of normality.

Dude, I have no idea what that means,  
But I'll steal it anyway.

Because I say and think things  
That make no sense at all:  
Some half-understood science,  
Some observational humor taken  
Far too seriously,  
Some of that old schoolgirl journaling,  
Taking a battered squeegee  
To my own johari window.

My sanity depends on knowing  
Metaphors are metaphors,  
So I collect them like  
A taxidermist terrified of death.

Like a celibate porn aficionado.  
Like an agoraphobic flash-mob choreographer.

I also collect similes.

So here's my advice for the maniacs:  
Stop torturing the numbers.  
Stop sacrificing the good for the perfect,  
The necessary for the good.

This is the strained muscle in a giraffe's neck.  
This is an epic in a supermarket receipt.

It is fleeting for all the right reasons.

## Tell Me a Joke

A poet and a scientist walk into a bar.  
The bar is called "Thesis Statement."  
The bartender is a helicopter.

Patrons get drunker than  
Intellectual housewives,  
'Cause the bartender,  
Let's call him "Splash Gordon,"  
Hovers like an intellectual parent.

The scientist is social  
And uses "utilize"  
When he means "employ."  
The poet is asexual  
And hugs like the letter A.

The bartender pours shots  
Taken live on the scene.  
The bar is exclusive.  
It's an exclusive.  
It's excluding.  
You wouldn't have heard of it.

The scientist knows apologetics  
Like the back of a petri dish.  
The poet has feelings  
And makes a big deal of it.

The bartender pours shots  
Of an intersection  
Of a freeway.

The poet and the scientist  
Watch on the tiny television,  
Black and white,  
Foil-wrapped antennae  
Arranged slightly off-kilter  
For better reception.

The scientist doesn't feel anything,  
Imagines surgery in diagrams.  
The poet smokes cigarettes apologetically.

The bartender,  
Let's call him "Intervention McGee"  
Pulls levers and flies the bar around the city,  
Shines searchlights that flood  
Backyards with visibility,  
Pours between blinds,  
Crosses off residents like hashmarks  
Sorts residents like hashtags  
Residents press pound for more options.

The poet and the scientist are shitfaced  
Drunk and singing the epistemology blues.

The bar lands in the woods  
And explodes in a collective groan.

## The Time You Get Is the Time You Get

Resolution:

Stop making friends with people

Just because you feel sorry for them.

Like drinking beer in the summer 'cause you're hot and  
thirsty,

This practice will eventually turn on you,

Producing the opposite of the desired effect.

The chronically pathetic,

Much like animals and small children,

Are so keenly aware of insincerity that they can almost  
actually smell it.

And

Just like animals and small children,

They will put up with you just long enough

To get the meat or candy or approval

Before they bite or scream for the cops

Just as you're about to hustle them into the carrier or the  
wood-paneled van.

Resolution:

Start keeping an enemies list.

It'll help on those nights when forgiveness comes creeping in

Like a grandmother

Who washed your mouth out with soap

And sent you to bed without supper

But still wants to tuck you in

And kiss your tiny forehead as you pretend to sleep.

Beware:

Comfort is a sucker's game for grown-up babies who don't  
know how to be brave at bus stops,

And forgiving is a comfort.

Resolution:

Live less lonely than my mother.

This one is easy.

I may as well resolve to be less schizophrenic than Joan of Arc.

All this requires

Are simple things

Like never substituting thank-you notes for heartfelt  
conversation,

Or social networking websites for a circle of friends.

Confession: I left my bicycle chained to your fence in Eagle  
Rock so I would never have to talk to you again.

Confession: I didn't apologize for slapping that girl you liked  
so I would never have to talk to you again.

Confession: I told your fiancé that you were seeing your ex  
behind his back so I would never have to talk to you  
again.

Little known fact:

Those bisexual-for-attention girls aren't always bisexual for  
attention.

Even when they're sometimes not exactly what you would  
call gay.

It's just that the urge to hold on can be so strong that it turns  
to the urge to dive in...

She mistakes tongue kisses for thank-you notes,

And the warm press of flesh for heartfelt conversation.

We all make these slight miscalculations.

Whatever

Is the spiritually broke man's ohm.



We can know peace like a coma  
And regret that's as pure as an ocean-washed stone.  
We can forgive in the dark  
Under blankets that smell of mentholatum and ancient  
vitamins.

We can cradle warm memories like a sickly kitten  
And bite the sharp ones back.  
Treasure every unkind word never said.  
The time you get is the time you get.

## Oncology Fight Song

What will I miss about cancer?

    Warm blankets  
Every single doctor's office  
Had an oven full of blankets  
At the ready  
And gangs of nurses  
Ready to descend  
Upon the slightest hint of cold  
Wrapping us up  
Like presents or babies  
In repeatedly-bleached  
Folded scratchy toasted blankets  
To approximate the  
Lofty, unachievable goal  
Of comfort.

What will I miss about cancer?

    Permission to waste food  
    With impunity  
To the point where  
I have been congratulated  
For eating half a cup of yogurt  
My every slightest whim indulged  
My husband rushing out  
To get me anything  
I think I might possibly  
Be able to eat.

What I won't miss?

Ensure. That shit is disgusting.

What I won't miss?  
Staring down the scale  
Every .5 pound loss  
Screaming, "You're failing!"

This is the one thing  
We can all agree  
Western women can do:  
Get fat,  
And I have nothing to do  
But count calories in the  
Opposite direction  
And the doctors say,  
"I know you aren't doing this on purpose."  
Well, thank the high holy hell out of you for that,  
At least,  
How I've been waiting...

You know, I swore  
When it was over,  
I would never just take  
The good-natured jabs  
About my lucky, skinny ass  
From all the ladies  
Who love to hate their weight.

I do though.  
I still take it.  
I don't say shit.

(Though I'd rather be fat than dead.)

I think.

I'd rather be fat  
Than feel my bones  
Press through my flesh  
On the radiation table,

And see my bones  
Peek through my skin  
Like knives through  
A canvas tent  
In a horror film,

And know my bones  
Like you know a mother,  
Sustaining, recognizable

And know my bones  
Like you know a child  
So carefully watched  
As the breath rises  
As the breath falls  
As you wash delicate skin  
With unscented soap  
And some parts with aloe  
And some parts with alcohol.

What I won't miss:  
Being called a "strong woman"

What I will miss:  
All that time to read.

You know what they say about foxholes?  
It's true, 'cause I remember begging.  
You know what they say about foxholes?  
It's not true, 'cause I don't remember god.

But there was a part  
Where I couldn't give a shit  
About science or words  
Art or ambition  
Religion or death,

And love was only sleep.

And love was only sleep and my husband's hands.

And love was only sleep and my husband's hands  
And chicken soup.

And love was only sleep and my husband's hands  
And chicken soup and my cat's voice.

And love was only sleep and my husband's hands  
And chicken soup and my cat's voice  
And my mother-in-law arguing with nurses.

And then I woke up.





*notes/drawings*





