

Thing I Believe

Dedicated to the students of 601, 602 and 604.

Prologue:

Things I Believe

I believe in old ladies,
I believe in church hats,
I believe in young people
falling in love,
and in embarrassment.

I believe in front steps, in the early morn
and in reading and rereading
until the idea of repeating is gone.
I believe in missing,
I believe in being confused.

I believe in the skyline,
in trees, hard days, slow ways,
and in being soothed.
I believe in children's rapture,
in being nervous, but never being used.

I believe in love long
after it has no more worth
and I believe in change,
in changing plans,
making myths
in color wheels,
in trysts and mirth
in trying, in living
with my best
not being
near enough, in no such thing
as enough,
in enough
enough.

I believe in exhaustion
and in the world being big,
in seeing everything,
whether or not it wants to be seen.
I believe in children
on the subway
with their feet dangling,
I believe in being small,
and in being always
overwhelmed.

I believe in falling and catching,
in recognizing need.
I believe in wanting
to share a point of view.
I believe in loneliness
and misguided isolation too.

I believe in
trusting, in showing
in sight sharing
in seeing and never seeing
the same,
in again.

I believe in no escaping,
I believe in dreaming,
I don't believe in sleep.

I believe in control,
I believe in self,
I believe in knowing not for what,
in mistakes and all things misspelled.

I believe in treasure, and sadly,
I believe in loss.

I believe in pebbles, and in remembering
I believe in breaking fixtures, fixing,
light bulbs, and rarely
I believe in facts.

I believe
in going deep
down beneath
jackets and sheets,
in Sundays and Mondays
and feeling too
lucky,
in loud, quiet, comfort
in muscles, ankles
and whatever is exposed.

I believe in
what is and what is not.
I believe it is all about a red ribbon

someone did or did not tie in your hair,
what words someone did or did not say,
what words were or were not written there.

I believe in
symbols and sins
and unending
word searches.

I believe in searching,
not needing.
I believe in more
so much more than this.

Tap

ATTEMPTED PRISM

Not seeing out is how it is,
these things just are
(they say) and each day
fewer anecdotes suffice
to explain this disarray.

But here,
scaffolding rises
obscuring the view
of lost little lungs;
hammers hacking asbestos —
in this classroom
there is
little one
could understand
keep from
being a fly,
(we are all in too deep).

I could tell you of the morning
someone's father left, the belled schedule
maintained to hold sadness, as little bodies shake,
eyes glazed straight ahead,
focus lost, wanting the will to wage
the mêlée of yesterday becoming tomorrow, today.

Or I could tell you a different moral seen
for "The apple does not fall far from the tree,"
when a small someone, wanting invisibility, whispers,
"But sometimes Ms., after it falls,
it just keeps rolling."

For a moment, we smile and know
what it is to be home
where scaffolding filters
light to a broken system.

For a moment, we know why
to try, desperately, to prism.

FALL MORNING IN PROSPECT PARK

I catch myself
talking to the toaster
coaching “you’re not done,”
turning up the heat, slowly
learning the insignificance
of buttons.

I start to think,
if you were here
you might think I’ve lost
my mind,
only there is no you
who might actually think that.

There is the toaster,
who with some patience,
was coaxed to make me smile.

Who will notice, what changes,
where periods go,
how meaning is made?

Exhausted,
I take a walk—
a pack of roller bladders
stay in stroke,
a tornado of leaves
wakes behind a cop car,
a girl stands to pedal her bike,
a plane echoes in the grass,
a man smiles at me,
another plays saxophones.

There is no perspective—
you can hear a baby here
and a father cry, clutch, all at once
because the rest is even louder,
this land of no comparison
where shadows haunt.

To feel alone is to hear
everything, which is not bad,
only windy where we all must be both
together and separate at once.

Leaves turn,
soon it will be cold.
Pumpkins will patch us through
this October of lonesome mornings,
scattered holidays, little right here,
right now. Amidst change
I sit to think, if there is anything,
I could teach you.

I would like to show
how fleetingly beautiful it is
to be here, to notice, to know.

BROOKLYN STOOP

From two blocks down
I see Marie's distinctive frame—
the heavy shift from left foot to right,
square shoulders of a coat too big
and a body too frail
shift stepping
towards November's dementia
sitting outside in her folded beach chair,
umbrella above when it rains.

This is not the beach,
this is a stoop
overlooking long since paved streets.

Marie says, "Be a dear and help me
button my blouse."

In spite of myself
I learn the value
of being late.

SEPTEMBER 7TH, 2007

It is late in the city that never
recycles right. Sleep steals
something daily,
rejuvenation at a premium.

Gaining their attention
I know not yet
what to say.
There is a lot
they need
to know
(though quiet seems far
from important
and silence linked with sadness
and sadly something they must learn).

Racing the rush of routine
I stay later, longer—
tomorrow rings
already.

OVER-CAFFEINATED

Your cup is almost empty
and your brain is full
with your heart beat, hard beating.

TO YOUNG ARTIST

You often forget your book bag
and I'm too slow to realize
there are reasons.

But after school the other day
you shyly asked me if I ever watched you play
basketball.

I smiled and said I did
through the window by my desk
you run, pass and drive
harder than you fidget in here
where I asked again for you to write
about the events that made up your life.

You looked distracted and what's more,
yelled, what the fuck was I asking you for?

Why should you tell anyone
what happened to you?
Face one more someone
unsure what to do,
telling you,
"Write about it,"
(I know, I do it too).

But here's why,
you're smarter than me
you've already seen
more than I'll ever see,
and all I know about are these
dusty things, called books
where people escape
when they can't face another
insufficient look,
or the moment they notice
the holes beneath our noses
are holes that can't make much
but murmurs
and they're mad, you're mad, I'm mad
we're yelling,
at spaces between faces on the train
at absence, and what comes
in between

people not saying what they feel or mean
leaving nothing but time
pen and page
to write down the things
you want to see change
and fear never do.

What can I tell you?
I watch you play
and learn
there must be something
worth saying.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TEACHER?

Does it mean not noticing the sounds outside
of upcoming spring, shrieks of laughter
when there are so many things to do?

Does it mean hearing the murmurs unmentioned
the sounds in a vacuum near unknown
and noticing what might otherwise hang
in the air and never touch your tiny ears?

Does it mean imagining what might sound nice?
Inspiring you to seek what might be right?

Does it mean finding a way
to let you see the way I say, "Try!"
and stay unafraid, stay, stay, and stay?

Does it mean asking the question:
"How the hell did this happen?"
just enough
so I don't drown
in your tear ducts?

Or does it mean remembering after all,
that this is the history of us
and together we'll fall
if America is born and raised,
preemptively wincing
and waiting for pain,
or worse ignored
by exhaustion
and put down
further on the list
of things to do
and what to
accomplish.

Or does it mean,
me looking at you
and asking once more,
"What else can I do?"

WHEN

You start to get mad
when the substitute asks
why their grammar's so bad
after you've listened to her
yell through the walls
all day.

You start to get mad
when you're walking home
and in store front reflections
you see your own furrowed brow
flash yourself a smile
and it doesn't go away
(meta headache
maintained).

You start to get mad
when after a year and a half
the Chinese boy
scores an age four
on a reading comp test.

You start to get mad
when the one who's excelling
starts to act out because
her dad just got imprisoned
and he was the super
so they've been evicted
and oh, her sister's gone missing.

You start to get mad
when you find out
the kid with the speech impediment
didn't speak until he was four
because his dad beat him so bad
and he just got out of jail,
hanging around again.

You start to get mad
when you notice a girl
is mostly deaf
(she's also a Russian immigrant
who's half black
and hates black people

or maybe just her drug addicted mom
or maybe school
or maybe herself)
and her dad's dying.
They're already in a shelter
so I buy her shampoo
and mouth words at her.
The literacy coach mentions
"She doesn't do her work in class.
It must be your lessons
why aren't you more astringent
about expectations?"

You start to get mad
when the obese kid,
who saw his dad shot and killed,
writes about it sometimes
but mostly wanders around the room
looking for someone
who will pay attention.

You start to get mad
when this kid keeps repeating this noise
that you've rationally explained a million times
is annoying, disruptive, blatantly rude
said on a spectrum of calm to infuriated
to different tunes.
He has a mute brother
who he has to pick up
everyday after school
so he likes to be loud
he's even pretty funny.
His mom gets called in,
she cries
at a meeting
where we all trip over ourselves
to provide useless solutions
for the under-aged, over responsabilified
who probably just wanted to scream.

I start to get mad
when I wonder how they even smile
when seven hours of periphery
nearly annihilates mine.

I'm just supposed to teach them to read.

3:10 PM

I hear kids loitering
the hallway
I listen
something bubbles
about the back corner
of the schoolyard.

I go to the door,
eyes scatter.

I call Isaiah
say, "Something going on?"

"Nah, we're cool."

"You stay away, you hear?"

"Yes miss."

I go for help
but nearly everyone has gone
home
already.

Down the hall I tell
the science teacher.

"Want to know what I really think?" he says.
I start to walk out
without the nerve
to say no
so he shouts
"It's 3:10
not my problem,
not today."

Back down the hall,
two kids try the office.
It's kids from another school they say
another teacher casually listens.

He tells one kid he'll walk him home.

"Nah, I don't need to be lookin like some fuckin pussy

walkin outta here with no teacher.”

“Oh.”

I offer the same to the other
and mumble
“Not that I’d be of much use.”

I’m told to call the guidance counselor instead,
and I do,
but surprise,
he’s left the building too.
He tells me nonetheless
to go downstairs
I’ll be able to find
a security guard there.

She’s slowly standing when I say,
“Excuse me, some kids are concerned
there’s some people waiting for them ...”

“Dumb kids
should have told me earlier
it’s after three,
my shift’s over.”

“Oh” I say, “Well whose on next?”

“Not here yet.”

“Well isn’t there something we can do?”

“You let them tell you
your problem now.
I don’t let them tell me things.”

Then she trudged down the stairs.

Back upstairs the kids have gone.

I go to put my head in my hands

blue
with exploded marker.

WINTER

What might happen next
little branch, to whom I've grown
so attached?

Do leaves ever want
to hear you say their name
as they fall.

THE ERASER

“Who threw the eraser?
Who tripped into whom? Who pushed?
Who apologized? Whose father left
this morning? Who lied?”

Resounding questions, like footsteps on a floor
the morning paper asserts itself once more:
“Children’s Health Insurance Plan
Vetoed.”

Veto: the right to say no.

It could be a vocabulary word.
“Children, copy it down—veto:
your country’s failing you
and look this is how
to read this senseless drivel—
The main idea to distill:
the absence of
thirty five billion dollar bills
that might have fixed your glasses,
scarcely bound with scotch tape,
made medicine for your cough
or helped you not get pregnant.
Instead they vetoed the money
criticizing this clause or that
afraid of this ideal of progress.
Simply not doing harm
should be a bill we could advance
but in Congress they haven’t learned
to work together yet
so we’re trying to teach you to do better
come your turn.

I toe this line and
tell you the eraser means more
than madness on my face
it begets a choice to build a life,
with dreams you can more than chase.

Because you are brilliant and you know
when someone offers you thirty five billion dollars
not to say “No.”

The truth seems so obvious
if you let it be.

So,
now,
who threw the eraser?

HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDE AND YOUR NOTEBOOK

I would like to say,
“I’m unsure
what I did
to offend you
on this glorious
morning”
with an ugly, sarcastic grin.

But you will sulk and say
“But I wasn’t talking,”
and I will say
“But you are now,”
and you will say
“But”
And I will say
“I don’t care,”
and it will not be a glorious morning
anymore.

Except the problem is I do
care, which is why I’m here
at this ungodly hour of the morning
wondering how to make you work.

So you really must
mind your attitude this minute
because I mind
when you don’t,
because you’re better
than that.

You are able to write
the moment your father never came to your graduation
and the moment you did well
on that test and the way you taught someone
second position, the posture you choose,
to attain success.

“No, you will not speak to me that way,”
and “No, you may not sharpen your pencil
because we’re here to celebrate mistakes,”
the ink of decisions we make
choices again and again
and I would like for you to choose

to listen to yourself learn,
listen to yourself say,
“This attitude is less than I deserve,
and I will not tolerate
the cheap distraction of bad moods.”

Simply, I want you to write,
to take pen and craft
this attitude to say:
it is my glorious morning
and I will find a way
through these pages.

Filtration Plant

DINNER WITH EXBOYFRIEND

I ate your chocolate on the way home
awaiting canned laughter
only you could make real
by sideways glances.

I want to tell you
it is possible
to re-pitt a cherry after eating it—
trope towards sun
but watch the leaves allay
the wind, cherry trees, truth,
and you'll know
history insides out
again and you almost open,
again. Your top button
eases—as I slip
fingers in? Cherries unpicked,
remnants of what might
have been. I've been
fingering the batter bowl.

Men sing a cappella on the train
someone smells of piss,
blackjack on a cell phone with sound effects
turns on, a heavy collapse
into the train
ride home.

ANYWAY

I try to tell you one thing
but can't and say another,
hoping you will
make the invisible jump
to conclusions
I need. To know
this, does not help.

Anyway,

there is nothing
you can say,
except everything

I cannot hear.

COUNTER

Sitting on the countertop
you tell me about accidentally
shooting a goose,
chaos flocking
swirling clouds.

Looking down I wonder
how my loosely laid thighs
would feel around you.

You pet the space
of bread nearly baked
airing dust
off an aged dog.

KAYAKING AND OTHER DISASTERS

Wondering if
you've sucked me dry.

The seaweed has my paddle,
and this river is no sink.

We lack drain pipes
or any attachment.

On the bus home,
I nearly fall in
the portable toilet.

Where did the river go?
This is not the way kissing began.

BY WAY OF RESPONSE

You write,
“Whenever I come here
I long for you.
Somehow the brick buildings
your hair,
the white window frames
the contours of your face
and that seeping glare,
sunlight through clouds,
always you.”

I put the postcard down
and have another sip of coffee.

This is Brooklyn after all.

HANSEL AND GRETEL'S PEBBLES

In the back car of the F train,
I hug the subway pole
again unable
to accept much
moving forward.

Forward is nowhere.
There are cores of earth
beneath us, trees
rising with a sense of wonder.
Sense? Senses can't recreate
the ways I would make
this moment real
with someone other
than this pole.

A train passes,
a child's eyes shake
seeking somewhere still.

You are not here, but could be
lost light in a photograph.

HOOSIER

In my new apartment
my father tells me
he tacked the “Hoosier” sign
to the cabinet
after it fell off.

It is my mothers’ cabinet,
their old house files forward
in the rolodex of images
as he gazes at it.

“I couldn’t get it quite right,”
he says.

“But at least you got it on”
I say.

FATHER RECOVERS FROM SURGERY

The day after I removed his shoes,
he says "Kiddo,
I have some advice for you,"
slouched back, anesthesiologically mouth-dried
"It all comes down to luck,
you can concoct as many reasons
for being alone
as you have neurosis."

I am neurotic
and he feels badly
that it has ramifications.

He offers drugged comments on love:
"It will happen, kiddo."

He is a lawyer.
This is logic.

I love
how illogical I make him.

SNELL'S LAW¹ (DEAR SARAH)

Your accents are different.

That is all
though in attentiveness
you periodically panic
that you straddle continents.

But panicking is not periodic,
so remember
the Bering Land Bridge
exists only under water—
a connection deeper
than ocean ships shaking.

Were you impossibly in sync
(two conch shells around one head)
you would no longer be two,
instead overlapped
crest to trough,
no excitement to graph.

A wave alone
misses sea.
The dissonance of consonance
enables horizon.

And what would a world be worth
with no morning up
evening down
lunar cycle
out of step
nooks and crannies
catalysts, substrates
electrocardiograms.

You notice how light fills
the other's lash. Enough to
cross from alone to another.

From somewhere sound,

¹A law in physics that describes the relationship between the angle at which light hits something, and where the light goes after it hits that something, (keeping in mind that the media the light is first in, and the media the light hits, are different). The law says that how the angles are related depends on the media themselves.

to someplace quiet, you each listen
for the refractive index of the other

(like rays of light strike water,
the ocean is yours to walk).

NEXT WEEK

I wish you were
partly inside me
seeing how everything shakes
and little is stable
but love
which takes over
like flowers on a dining room table

and threatens
like next week.

ATTEMPT

I tried to write a poem about the way you appear
and make me smile, even when you're not here,
but it didn't work,
so this is just to say,
I have eaten
the popcorn
that was in
the bag
it smelled so roses are red
and then I fell asleep singing
show tunes. Oh how spring it is
in love with us and our scanty scary dreams
of bright mornings
waking up together.

I like to say "I love you,"
which you were probably
saving
for a special time.

Forgive me,
I think about you
when you're not here.

SOLAR ECLIPSE

This is it
once we may
watch what focuses us
go away, no longer that which makes obscure
what it is we think we see
just a line: moon, sun and me.

It will be unlike this tomorrow
when the world becomes again anew.
But I would like to waltz with you,
anyway.

Before the morning breaks,
let me show you every fantasy
I have softly canopied,
afraid.

I know no shelter
near as strong
as what I've built in want of this
so if I ask you to come near
trust that it is safe
to create, to eclipse.

We will not be who it is we want
to be on the count to three
it's not this simple
what is true,
but in your company there's
exploring to do.

Just lay me on this bedless world
and hold me like
sunlight still matters
in a future yet unseen.

MARCHING PIXELS

Some things cannot be compared
(there is too much there where
protons make nebulae eventually)
We cannot choose what to discern,
sentimental bleeds brutal
(we are dots in the world
amidst earthly pixilation)
choosing to not want
it all at once.

On the other side of where you are
there is someplace you want to be
(watch your feet not go straight,
or look up, end up, where you meant).

But what if we were bewildered always
nighttime crying darkness
morning smiling
all calling
hands flying above
pianoed peace
fingers faintly shaking
eyes averted seeking
where minds go—
that place of no contact
craved and reviled.

(I should tell you
how sky breaks
before you make motion
know it's like waking up from a dream
in a dream
fantasy blurred and windy).

Carbonation

CURIOUS

Along First Avenue
houses line up
between what was and what is
boarded up windows
must lie in mere frames
where within light once streamed.

Traversing distance
in exponential leaves
commuters face inexplicable
blocks of outlines compiled.
Fracturing venom
phloems back
stacked apartments.

Our supposed to senses distribute neural notions
self-creating disconnections
in search of wonder only alone
in unknowing.

And yet I wanted to tell you
that this morning the sun rose
calm over the East River
though I did not see it
I know
it did.

I wanted to say, “Colors
spread like only sky can
(but how afraid was I
laughed and said
something tangible instead
so the image in your head
would bear resemblance to what I see
to me—
though that image would
have nothing to do
with the joy of having seen it
or even you.
And then this pretense would be
simply what it seems—again.
But at least, alas, you will likely not
have disappeared).

Frames discolor and I cannot trace
the person whose memory has been erased
by newly layered paint
that comes and keeps
coming continuance
—tan window frames on steely blue
color schemes old and new
inside which eyes have peered
out on this scene for many years—
the woman sweeping
cement squares
past the daily deli,
kids recycled, older getting
tailing mothers climbing rush
to a place that abducts trust
in the name of self-sufficiency.

It rained earlier,
now it is clear,
seasons never cease,
and I am stuck
on the sky,
in lieu of explanation,
to believe this trek
up and back, up and back
makes a journey
worthwhile to share.

The graffiti says snow
though it doesn't stay above subway tunnels.
When it gets too warm
it rains individuals
never known.

Wonder must be collected,
kept, spreading itself before us
unsortable, in no need
of sorting.

A woman spits seeds into her palm.

FOUND POEM FROM MORNING MEETING/CHEERY START TO DAY

“I can neither confirm nor deny
anything about A.C.S.”

Please don't leave a suicidal child unattended.
If they're homicidal let them run. Ha ha. Silence.

If there is a fire in the building
or a bomb
on the L train
you will be directed to do certain things—
shut your doors—
the intercom system does work
after all
in certain rooms.
We're working on it.

Code blue—a kid's down.
Some of us are pre-C.P.R. trained.
Some of us aren't.
Someone will come.

God forbid one of our teachers or students die,
it is not an immediate crisis.
But there will be counseling set up.

Don't speak to the press.

You will be given a copy
of the plan.

Tales of A SAPIS Worker

The substance abuse prevention and intervention counselor
will be six weeks late.

He is in the rubber room
(unrelated to kids).

He was playing tennis,
got mad,
smashed his partner over the head
with a racket—
it was proclaimed
a brain hemorrhaging rage.

Do not be alarmed,
he'll be back soon

to discuss choices

with your first period class.

PRAXIS²

“Individuals have the ability to transform dominant discourses for liberatory purposes.”
– Lisa Delpit

We ask students
to become literate
in the discourse of their oppression
and scream when they will not
conform.

Rational we remind ourselves
we are rational
so we must scream
of frustration, not fury

at the need for a language
unknown, no dictionaries
to describe how we might communicate
amidst this messy socialist
experiment with test tubed children
controls teasing who might make it
to meaningful places
above others.

Success for all mantras along
as long as one is suspended between stairs
climbing somewhere
necessitating lost tracks
of before and after.

Can I arm you to do more
than scramble through clouds
on landscapes unmoving,
spiraling space allegiant to
burning sun?

² If we are asking students to not reject learning a foreign secondary discourse (even though it may cause a loss of self, to some degree), then we, as educators need to be willing to lose some sense of self (and our own selfish notions of what is progressive) to teach them the superficial structures of middle class discourse. If the answer for them is not to not learn, then the answer for us is not to not teach, it is to acknowledge the superficiality of our own power, and give them the tools to overthrow what is merely a difference in discourse. “Individuals have the ability to transform dominant discourses for liberatory purposes – to engage in what Henry Louis Gates calls “changing the joke and slipping the yoke,” that is, using European philosophical and critical standards to challenge the tenants of European belief systems (162).”

(Buds come
towards spring
inching along.)

GRADING

At best, grading is like
getting a compliment you asked for.

Mostly it is like asking for a compliment
and getting stabbed repeatedly by forks,
or like editing your own poems
with no pen
the mistakes, permanent,
tomato sauce on a new dress,
only space for reprimand.

I search
for the line
to make my reflection
what I wish,
I want to see how brilliant
I have been,

but mostly I am not.

And you have so carefully written
all of these essays
I have to read
with no hope of going counter clockwise
to when I could have said
“Wait, before you write that,
think about this.”

But that moment is gone,
so now I must be
constructive.

“Nice handwriting,”
I could helplessly say,
and then sometimes I laugh—
you have been humorous
revealed yourself somehow
in this stilted form
you went beyond my limited
expectations.

Joy.

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

The honor roll is posted
on dinky, pastel colored paper
un-centered and haphazard
between gold glittered stars,
glue-stick gunk still showing.

Kids chatter excitedly
about making it.

The only parents who can come
have honor students—every one.
So what have those
who won't even know
the half glittered hope
of poorly hung
pastel dreams?

What if no one told them before?
No one had the strength to believe
they could make it. Not just say it
(sure some that could do)
but who, through and through, thought you
yes you, could have your name in colors?
Who drew attention to the blank
your name could fill?
Who wasn't scared to say, "Even if I see no way
I will make the time today to not
pretend and really say,
I know not how, I know not where
but I see your soul, and I see it clear
that there are moments
of deepest grace when your eyes flicker
and I know the deep disgrace of you not knowing
that you are eleven
so only eleven, and all things are
impossibly possible.

PRIVATE SCHOOL

On the subway
two boys see a girl
they once knew.
One says
“Ask her if she broke up with Kevin!”
(And they do).
She says she has, and they ask why
and she shyly shrugs a sigh.
Boy one asks
if it was another girl
and boy two, if her sister
had to do
with it
and she looks down
and says nothing.

They mention the food at her school
“It’s good” they’ve heard.
“How much?” they say.
She says “Thirty,”
and they say, “Per day?”
(Astounded)
And she says “Thirty thousand.
Per year,”
and all of a sudden it is clear
that they come from similar places
but went on different paths
so they stumble over what else to ask
though they look so tough
they want to know who had enough
to send her off and shortly she’s gone
in a trance of headphoned thoughts.

They laugh anxiously.

I sigh, hoping that this doesn’t mean
they won’t try to struggle through
whatever it is that made them sad
enough to ask a girl they barely knew
if the food was good

or if someday they could be understood,

not as rude,

just hungry,
for a real chance.

MAPRS CANNOT BE REPAVED

“We’ve been warned against offering the people of this nation false hope. But in the unlikely story that is America, there has never been anything false about hope.”- Barack Obama

I am worried for you
in a way I can no longer afford
to worry for myself—
knowing the limits of my own
hopefulness
the ways I can
pick myself up,

the ways I cannot.
The disappointment of not
getting up again, as high,
of witnessing
change.

You, young, full of seeing
your way still, you have
the dictionary (the unknown alone
What seems impossible).

Wastefully you wage
on worthlessness
(those barely tremors
of sometimes laughter)
wealthy you are
with not knowing
the worth of self.

Who are you fighting
in your head?
Are they here? If not come back,
come be near.
Put your eyes on the text
and don’t look up
distraction is simply not good enough.

Can I ask you to forget everything
you’re whirling through
even if it is what it is
that makes you, you?
Who am I (?) to undo you

as if future were something
I once knew?

At least roundabouts
have exits.

IF YOU GIVE UP

We hold these truths
to be self evident,
but we're tired?

I know,
no,
that is not
how it goes
but it is hard to know
everyday, to stay on task,
stay and stay,
when it is early
and all I want
is to look away
from little face #22
who has needs
just like you and you
who blinks and says
“But listen, please, just to me
and see the obstacles
I cannot see. See
around what cannot be named
and move aside with ease and grace
all the pain you cannot erase.”

And as if I were just too slow,
you add one more thing and say,
“Ms., if you give up, I'm giving in,”
and truly what now can I do but stay
and say I'll try for one more day?

ANTI-SENSE

Swallowed a cherry pit,
felt happily alone,
when I giggled at the back of class
about what wombs can grow.

The professor rambled on
about the history of dissent,
why we need criticism,
and what I should have read
by now
maybe he forgot
how it feels
to go out on your own
the magic of the world and words
mixed up and unknown.

Maybe it's as simple
as the trusty alphabet
repeatedly we must decide
what words to make
and to reject.

So simply,
if growing is going
without knowing
what yet means,

I choose
next.

ALEXANDER POPE/DISMISSAL

Time was synchronized
in the Garden of Eden
I think,
as you plural
tell me
it is time
for dismissal.

Universal three pm
and other costs
of the knowledge tree accrue,
(the modern mind
has not been kind
to absolutes,
devouring measly crumbs
as sustenance
for propulsion).
I should throw the clock
across the classroom
smash your watch
make a scene
show you what it means—
what what means?
What does it mean

to discover the universal truths
yet unknown?
Study nature, or history, or regulations
(they are all one
and the same).
Discover values
not created by us
just abstract
what is
already there.

Celebrate structure;
simultaneously realize
its limitations.
(Oh, and walk on water
while you're at it.)

After that,
you may be dismissed.

CALENTURES³

If you start at the end
and go back to the beginning
you'll find the truth
and a craving
for the big bang
you'll never see.

It is not a gentle world,
the light
the end
motion towards ending
justified as again
the beginning
recycle
reuse
refuse
to believe
self-destruction
ensues
surely we would not
let waves take us
away
from this
beautiful
mess.

But then again
we too want a carpetbag
from which to pull
the object which
could show the world
the commonality
within which
we could all find reason
to exist.

Alas, nothing ever fits confines
and to our separateness we must be resigned
but oh how many tragedies I would suffer
crying loudly in front row
closing my lids
solely because I know

³ A tropical fever or delirium suffered by sailors after long periods away from land, who imagine the seas to be green fields and desire to leap into them.

that somewhere someday
further along
I might find something someday
to depend on.

Americans like tragedies with happy endings
diagnoses for diseases on a checklist.
(A pipe that we'll have 300 years to chew
a new bone.)

It's a world of public combat
kindness and gentleness
wait in another age

They'll come
If you believe in translation.

Print this upside down.

You'd rather not read it.

AFTER SCHOOL 1/6/08

He said,
“Can you cry from a headache?”

“Definitely,” I replied.

“Can you cry from nothing?”

“Well, you might think it’s nothing,
but deep down, maybe ... ”

“Oh,” he said,
then looked down.

“Do you cry often?”
I asked

“No,”
he retorted,
too fast.

“Oh,”
I said. “So, do you want to work on the vacation packet?”

“No, I have a headache” he replied.

“I cry often too,”
I tried.
But not that often
and not that way,
(we both knew).

Today somebody broke
his grandmother’s rosary beads.
His beads, he, who
is a talented artist first,
has a headache second,
and lives in foster care too.

He says “Thanks” before he leaves
I wonder what for and smile
meaninglessly,
wishing it could mean
more.

DREAM ABOUT STUDENTS OVER THE SUMMER

I am moving.

My stepmother's exercise
weights do not fit.
I leave them unpacked.
(I'll find room for them
somewhere, somehow.)

Suddenly I am standing —
the corner, you and your friends
13 and cliquey.
I am happy to see you
this is just like class
except we're on the streets
and you're excited to see me.
You write hurriedly on chart paper
I pull from my carpet bag, smiling.

My mother's car pulls up
and the son of the upstairs neighbor
(who had a crush on her)
and I used to baby sit
gets out of the car
and he's 13 now too
and telling me to hurry up
"Put your things
in the trunk," quickly filling in
"We need to take the pictures,
just like last year,"
but his voice is this distant sound
dust shifting really loud,
and I keep asking what he means
when he starts yelling at me
"How could you forget?"
I'm still dumbstruck looking around
when his father steps out and starts yelling
and then my mother too
who I try to tell
that the weights really have to go in the car.
"But there's no time," she tells me, "There's no time
we have to go take these family
photos," I wrack my mind and still
I don't remember,
this didn't happen, this isn't how it goes,

I'm starting to know
this doesn't make sense

when a feral cat climbs out of the car.
I manage,
"Really, with us? We have to take this?"

But just as it's about to attack
one of you
I grab it
mid air,
time seems to slow.
My old apartment fades
from the periphery I see
someone pick their son up
from the corner
"You coming back next year?"
he shouts.
"I'm kinda busy"
I think (feral cat still on hand)
but say "Of course,"
and he shakes his head
that way adults do
when they think "Oh you still
you can make sense of all this."
And I want to scream,
"What am I supposed to do?"

Tall men on the corner overshadow you,
it's getting dark
my hands are full
"I'm sorry," I say
waking up.

POTTER'S FIELD

Things are so ordinary
and terribly
important.

Today
a kid
called me
the best teacher ever
and the dean called me Judas.

Someone rolled their eyes,
I ate kim-chi,
my cleavage burnt and itched
beneath my blouse
leftover sunrays dancing.

The gym teacher cried
her cousin died
a drunk driver
and there it goes—
days of anecdotes
untold.

My heart's mad,
can't take the layers of levity
adding up to weight.

Heavy
like flesh on a thigh bone
we move through sidewalks
of people unknown
who look like us
with whom we have no interest
in sharing.

Try
to stop,
and say,
"Hello."

Smile at the shadow of vines,
remind yourself today is full
of what could be sadness
but isn't.

It is
lit and lovely. Smile.
Those muscles know how
to remember that luck is beautifully horrific
and all we can do
is try to trust
how potter's field is sewn.

THANK YOU FOR MY GENTLY BROKEN HEART

I remember when my heart was broken
over no lemonade
I was lucky my heart was broken
just because it was Monday.

Adults hearts are broken in
from watching too much news.
My parents hearts were broken
but they got me pillows anyway.

He said growing up was like gathering upset
and all I could picture was a kid
gathering flowers
dead in his hand.

Kids rooms should be full of toys
they should never have to say goodbyes
or show up crying.

I want to give you a broken heart
(as a present)
I want to let you feel
what feels unsafe
I want you to know
when you're young
you're supposed to think
that everything is ok.