PART ONE:

THE FALL
TICKING ... TOCKING

My name is Lexi
    (rhymes with sexy)
McLeen, sixteen,
    and this is what I
believe:
    we are each
Teeny Little
    Grief Machines …
tick …
tock …
bombs
    programmed to explode …
if we have not
already
detonated.
MY ENTIRE FAMILY IS A DISEASE

Dad: Alcoholic. Depressive.
Borderline Personality Disorder.


The two of them together:
hoarders of cigarettes
and lottery tickets
that never win.

Blaine: Autistic. ADHD.

And me:
artistic.

That’s what they say
anyway.

I paint
in shades
of blue.
LINDA OATMAN HIGH

The poetry is just so

I don’t explode.
ONCE I CARVED H-A-T-E

On My Arm

With scissors.

Just the tip.

Skimming.

Slicing lightly.

A tiny silver nip of skin.

They thought

I must be a cutter;

but I wasn’t.

There was no knife.

I just hated my life.
IT ALL STARTED

After we lost the Baby.

It wasn’t our fault. Carissa, my little sister, just died in her white crib in my bedroom one night.

Peacefully, in her sleep, all tucked in, bundled, swaddled, surrounded by pink princess bumper pads and soft fuzzy blankets. She wasn’t on her stomach.

I can still see her face, sweet, pink-cheeked, eyes closed, baby butterflied eyelashes like tiny splayed paintbrushes wisping her face. She wasn’t breathing. I checked for breath.
Crib Death.

And I think she would have been
Normal
otherwise.
LINDA OATMAN HIGH

BED DEATH

She was so pretty,
that bitty little sister of mine.

Just three weeks lived;
now one year dead.

I can’t get her no-breath
face out of my head.

Sometimes I wish
we’d all just
get
Bed Death.
Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

In one big lump of sob and weep.

Why was she taken in the night?  
And when do I get some morning light?

Mourning …  
Light?

I know, right?

Sometimes …  
Life …  
Bites.
My name is Lexi
(rhymes with sexy)
McLeen, sixteen,
and this is what I believe:
We are each
Teeny Little
Grief Machines...

ticking...
tocking...
bombs
programmed to explode.
A HEART LIKE RINGO STARR

LINDA OATMAN HIGH
Part 1:

ON THE LIST
Names Don’t Change a Thing

Faith.
Faith Hope Stevens, 17,
destined for heaven.
That’s me.

They named me Faith
so they could keep
believing.

They named me Hope
so they could
cope.

But this disease?
It never leaves,
and names
don’t change
a thing.
Matching Toenails to Heart

I’m at a salon—
No-Fail Nails—
which feels a little
bit
like jail
for your feet.

Some people
think of this
as a treat.
But to me,
a pedicure
is torture.
Boring!

I’d rather have
action
than relaxing.
I guess
you always wish
for what
you don’t
already have.
“Do you enjoy?” asks the older lady who is scrubbing my toes.

I shrug.

“It’s a gift certificate. From somebody at Here’s-A-Wish.”

“Oh, how nice!”

_Not really._

_My feet aren’t into touchy-feely._
“Your name is Faith?”
asks the lady.

I nod. Make an effort
to smile.

“Faith Hope.”
I’ve got to try harder
not to mope.
It’s not her fault
that I’m sick.

“Pretty. It’s a name
that reminds you.
You never forget
to have faith!”

Lame.
I’ve heard
too many jokes
about my name
to laugh.
I’m half-asleep
anyway.
The lady pats dry one foot. She opens the polish.

“The color is nice.”

I picked “Blue Ice.” The color of my heart, on the inside, as I imagine it to be.

The lady paints. She doesn’t shake. Her hands are steady. My toes are ready for anything.

I wish my heart could say the same.
Wintertime

Outside,
inside,
all the time
wintertime.

Cold ice,
not nice,
tiny mice,
frozen slice:
wintertime.

No reason.
No rhyme.
Why’s it got to be
mine:
wintertime?
Bummer.
I so
want summer.
Popsicles.
Not icicles.

This pedicure tickles
my
toes.
Main Street

No-Fail Nails
is on Main Street,
Seafoam,
right down the
road from my home.

There’s snow,
but I walked
anyway.
That’s what Uggs
are for.

(That poor sheep
who gave her wool
to warm my feet.)

After the pedicure
I decide to turn right
and go to Pizza Delight
for a bite
to eat.
I’m beat.
Somebody in their teens
should not be
this sleepy!
(Or this weepy either.)

Can tears freeze?
I sneeze.

My breath floats
before my face,
a hazy cloud
of the wintertime

inside
and
out.
Still on the Outside
While Inside Pizza Delight

Pizza Delight
smells
delish.
I wish
I could live
inside
this smell.

They should sell
this smell.

The bell dings
when I walk through
the door.

It’s four
o’clock.
The place rocks
with kids
from Seafoam High.

I’m homeschooled.
I’m not cool.

Nobody knows
me unless they know
our funeral home.

Invisible. Dismal to be
me. Maybe I’m already
a ghost. Nobody knows
I am
here.

I order a slice.
Stare at neon lights.
Wish with all my might
that somebody
would just say “Hi.”

Why
must
I
always
be
on
the
O U T S I D E?
Great-Aunt Mary shrugs.
She grins.

“This world is just
a stage for people living
different lists,” she says.

“I know, right?” I reply.
“Nobody gets off the planet
alive.
We all will die.

All I want to know
is ...
why?