

An underwater photograph of a person wearing a dark red, pleated dress, floating in clear blue water. The person's head is tilted back, and their arms are outstretched. Bubbles are visible around the person, and the water surface is visible above. The lighting is bright, creating a serene yet mysterious atmosphere.

LINDA OATMAN HIGH

TEENY LITTLE GRIEF  
MACHINES

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 ...

ticking ...  
tocking ...

bombs  
programmed to explode ...

if we have not

already

detonated.

## MY ENTIRE FAMILY IS A DISEASE

Dad: Alcoholic. Depressive.

Borderline Personality Disorder.

Stepmom: Anorexic. Anger Issues. Bipolar.

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.

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 butterflyed 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.

## 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.

# TEENY LITTLE GRIEF MACHINES

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.



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