

**Domestic Momentum**

I honk,  
but it isn't enough.

Spend the day  
crawling through a new part of town  
looking for apartments,  
fold in the bored heat,  
commandeer coffee shop internet,  
drink too much coffee,  
hands tingle from caffeine,  
have to pee,  
sit in the car scribbling songs  
on the steering wheel,  
strike out with improbable repetition,  
have to pee again.

A cloudless sky punches down mercilessly,  
long days stretch paper-thin  
into a nefarious future,  
houses lie like stacks of dominoes  
dropping from domestic momentum,  
behind a *SOLD* sign a curtainless window  
reveals a girl and her father measuring the  
floor  
of an empty apartment,  
I watch them with envy,  
wondering if they would let me use their  
bathroom.

I sweat across another few blocks  
as the nation slips into fever,  
people treat each other  
with spider-vein values and broken bones,  
truth turns to icy ambivalence,  
eye contact is looking directly at the camera,  
families are dismantled by politics,  
no one knows what to do.

A few more miles and the streets are full  
of people with signs,  
some kind of demonstration,  
cheering for something better,  
yelling into the air,  
talking to tomorrow

hugging,  
hand holding,  
hoping.

Roll down my window,  
a little girl standing in the median  
with her mother holds up a sign.

*Honk if you believe.*

I honk,  
but it isn't enough.

## City Song

A single melody distinguishable  
between the throbbing city lights,  
a single note humming distinct  
amongst the metropolitan ruckus.

There is a symphony playing all the time,  
between sirens and scowls,  
bouncing through hollow alleys,  
hidden behind blocks of buildings;  
a definite harmony rings over ripping  
motorcycle engines and distant crowds.

The song that is LA plays on repeat  
with a sound so clear  
you can hear it through the fallow smog,  
shining tones like the midday sun,  
burning into the atmosphere  
while people listening  
below move across the city  
in magnificent untamed rhythm.

## Roadside Assistance

A truck rear-ended her  
somewhere just before Vermont  
on the 10 East.  
She called me on the way back  
from the car rental place.  
“I’m getting food and coming over.”

Collapsed trunk, deflated tire—  
glass fragments from the window  
throb across pavement,  
victims to the invisible wake of each passing car.

When she got here  
and started eating, I asked her,  
“Is everything okay?”  
“I don’t know,” she said slowly, looking  
down at her Mediterranean salad bowl,  
fragile from fear and lingering adrenaline,  
“they always forget my hummus.”

Parked on the median, rain intruding  
from heavy clouds in a cobweb sky,  
hazard lights mix with morning glare  
and that soft and dirty smell of wet concrete  
creeps unavoidably into every fragment,  
the ground shivers under the weight  
of all that rolling steel,  
the decay of car horns trail away in the wet wind,  
everybody is invariably late for something,  
a winding maze of lane changes  
tear across the city in all directions,  
lives fly by at 80 miles an hour  
risking it all for a half-an-hour sprint  
across town,  
and they always forget the hummus.

## Sunset Boulevard

You can drive on Sunset Boulevard  
all the way from Echo Park,  
where Los Angeles started  
with eleven families  
and a few dusty streets filled with Mexican  
pride,  
down to the coast of Malibu  
where new homes are erected  
across private beaches  
with sand like organic mayonnaise.

Take it  
past the old ostrich farms  
of Griffith Park  
and the magnitude of movie studios  
housing the has-beens, the almost-famous,  
and the next-in-lines,

past the little cities of other worlds  
where you can visit Ethiopia and Korea  
in the same half an hour,

past pavement people  
with concrete faces and honey hair  
who walk  
who work  
who wish,  
descendants of the honest dollar  
commuting an untraversable city by foot,

past the excited air vibrating since  
miners arrived hoping for gold,  
that still buzzes in painted-on ears  
like fire under bare feet  
or siren dreams stoking token desire,

past the cardinal directions of Hollywood

where people have been sinning  
since they drank through prohibition  
and danced to Lucifer's mellifluous sounds  
of rock 'n' roll rumbling whiskey halls,

past the plastic in Beverly Hills  
with no charge limits  
that line the wallets of BMW-driving  
adolescents strung out on trust funds,

past the winding canyons  
and the country clubs,

past innumerable red lights  
and irrevocable traffic jams  
a one hundred thousand cars strong  
grinding back and forth the entire way,

past more traffic still,

past reality,  
past ordinary,  
past people buying happiness  
and wondering what love is,  
past people broke and in love  
wondering what happiness is,  
past people broken from love  
who used to be happy,  
and past people happy to break  
who know the truth about love.

Sunset is a twisted twenty-mile stretch,  
a wonderful scar  
dug into the ground of California  
that reaches across the chest of LA,  
past to present,  
connecting all the mad and beautiful dots.

## How to Survive in Los Angeles

You're not talking about anything  
if you're not talking about  
love  
or death  
or war.

But you can't just talk about  
love  
and death  
and war  
because everything has already been said.

Instead,  
you have to talk about effervescent eyes  
that bubble across the dinner table  
like champagne sunsets,  
as you melt into the soles of your shoes  
over and over  
and every neon dream in the city  
becomes more superfluous every time you  
see them blink.

Talk about the pin pricks that vibrate  
in the tips of your fingers from furtive fears  
as you bleed bone dry from the inside out,  
thinking about being left truly alone  
in the restless nights of a wild world  
while the reaper re-applies lipstick  
and leans in for the final kiss.

Talk about every single breath,  
and how each one is a thousand battleships  
and a million wishes all at once,  
how every morning is a trigger finger on your  
pulse,  
as you try to feel anything at all,  
just to keep from becoming another nameless  
causality of the day.

Talk about slippery tongues gliding  
over silver skin in small apartments  
that keep the terrible world behind  
faded walls from encroaching on  
a never-ending night of goosebumps  
and candle wax.  
Talk about the last time you cried

so hard you choked,  
about people that only live in memories  
and dirt and ash,  
the feeling of sand stinging sweaty fingers  
in the back of a black town car  
leaving the cemetery,  
and how all the driving  
and all the roads in the world  
can't take you back.

Talk about explosions in the chest  
and fire in the eyes,  
about a lifetime of chasing  
happiness at the end of a stick  
only to wear out the substance of your soul,  
about left-over wishes  
and broken-down dreams  
that once painted the world with possibility  
but now linger in your throat  
every time you swallow,  
an aftertaste of regret.

Talk about staring down the barrel  
and being brave enough to not try,  
about hospital beds and oxygen tanks,  
about thin skin and brown spots,  
broken jaws and abortions,  
first cars and last names,  
lists and buckets,  
is and was.

You see, you can't just talk about  
love  
or death  
or war—

You may as well try and figure out  
how to survive in Los Angeles.