ABSTRACT

25 Random Things About Me

by Stephanie Jo Elstro

These poems address the evolution of personal identity and interpersonal communication in an increasingly technological and scientific world. Often humorous, sampling from pop culture and everyday life, the poems probe communication styles and social constructs. The performance of subjectivity is explored through chance processes, textual manipulation and collage. Poems constructed of manipulated dream material investigate textual materiality and the authenticity of poetic voicing.
25 Random Things About Me

A Thesis

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# Table of Contents

**Part 1: Tales From the Expansion Mansion**
- Matters ........................................................................................................... 2
- From Marie Curie’s Pocket ........................................................................... 3
- The Death of the Network .......................................................................... 4
- Like Liars ....................................................................................................... 5
- I Want to be a Space Tourist ................................................................. 6
- Now With More Nougat ........................................................................... 7
- Love Lines of the New Millennium ......................................................... 8
- To You ......................................................................................................... 9
- Garbage Poem .......................................................................................... 10
- How to Go Green ..................................................................................... 11
- Dumpster Radio ........................................................................................ 12

**Part 2: Bed, Breath and Beyond**
- The Memory Machine ............................................................................ 15
- Afraid of the Dark ..................................................................................... 17
- Twin Scars .................................................................................................. 18
- What’soup ..................................................................................................... 19
- Cloud Jam ..................................................................................................... 20
- Now Hiring .................................................................................................. 21
- Ocean Shelf Tour ........................................................................................ 22

**Part 3: The Steamy Meta**
- Noc .............................................................................................................. 24
- Turne ............................................................................................................ 25
- The Mystic Toilet ........................................................................................ 29
Part 4: No Preservatives or Social Networking Cites........................................31
We Only Want to Play Girls.................................................................32
Rapture Bachelor............................................................................34
25 Random Things About Me.......................................................36
5 Card Dream Draw.......................................................................39

Afterword: Poems Take Their Clothes Off......................................49
Part 1:

Tales from the Expansion Mansion
Matters

You smell of hot tamales and I hate you
poetry. Shake your moneymaker
until your right leg falls Office
2004 Test Drive User I said “fuck you” and my look curdled to a point
of laughter at your pursed
lips in anger—fights over free
time and algorithms for a particle collider
creates mini-black holes are for suckers
of garbage. Because where
ya gonna turn when the earth is full of goop
and warehouse scientists suffocate without
any answers for why grey matters.
From Marie Curie’s Pocket

Take it as a woman’s job to hold things
close—make sense of reactions for everyone
else and slowly poison herself.
Just drawn to pretty things. Like dust of diamonds,
anything that refracts light.
But I’m a good girl—I am! A beast of a good
time on a bicycle and leading the way for stylish minds.
One comment about a beautiful blue-green
light is all that is needed to blame
curiosity on an obsession for shiny things.

By radioactive isotopes! A problem
tucked in a pocket, not a gluttony for gems! Hidden
in a desk drawer. Give away
the gold medals and self-purified radium.
What’s to a pocket? A glowing question with a scolding
answer. Hot pressed cancer
therapies and x-ray vision, but
the bomb! Throw the rest
back in the box with her smile.
network TV created all this
homogeneity call it
the static that binds Americans
the space between bodies
filled with electromagnetic energy
a series of crest-trough-crest
signals a frequency to just
sit still and receive
the episodic goblins burrow busily into
demographics bind us to bodies
like our own survive by media
conglomeration
on the street, Jane Six-Pack carries
a suitcase of no deals
whispers to the news anchor “dance with
the stars, but give up
on loving Lucy.”
Like Liars

Eat up all the old ways of lying
so I can see your eyes changing
colors. Yesterday a blue lunch, tomorrow
green with hunger. Mmm… my favorite
lie is how much I love you. Is it enough
or too much, like my masculinity—all
things I love are masculine. Like
my mother and my sister. But not like
America, with a feminine name that is anything
but—crashing into a dark dollar.

And I’m ill with fascination by what
it means—less cars! But less jobs! No
retirement! Why can’t we make the rich suck
on it? Role reversal would be ideal like
you play the woman who loves
dick-swinging poems and I’ll pretend
I can fuck you from behind with a reach-
around grip. Oh, I’m the only one who wants to
try it? You liars—scared of tap water and your own
reflection. Your reflection scares me too.
I Want to be a Space Tourist

Outer space and that old rocket
blast fanfare finally
a boundless commodity—

experience space for a period of time
after all, it’s a limited extent in one, two, or three
dimensions, priced at a hundred million,
so, when would you be interested in going:
_____ I have to save the money first
_____ I want to be on the first mission
_____ Lifetime goal

The Space Race—sets us apart
puts a little distance in middle of things.
A once in a carbon-life-time
opportunity to catch an Earthrise
collect a lunar stone remain weightless for two weeks
to look down upon the rest of world

Buy a ticket from those hip Ruskies,
their motto—If you can’t beat capitalism,
join it fling it into outer space
let billionaires foot the bill and carry them along
research anti-gravity’s effects on their back aches.
Now with More Nougat

Hot cross buns are on
the menu of the universe (and the bedroom). The Milky
Way is no little sister no more. Watch out! The two
don’t work out because she is narcissistic and he is
domineering but in a kind, big brother way.

She wants him to want to smash
into her and cause worlds
to explode in two to three billion years.
One needs self
love the other needs love out.

Possibilities to complicate the relationship of hot
goo that human terms don’t fit—dark
matter voids in understanding—gimme more
word stuff, and fake
enthusiasm! Expressionless but brains
buzz onward.
All this high-speed, high-tech communication thanks to satellites circle the earth whole, suck waves in one end and zap out another.

:spit thick soda saliva down past chin and slurp it back up—a sweet life juice with \( \frac{1}{2} \) the calories and zero trans fats.
To You

I love you as an exterminator searches for bed bugs in light sockets and box springs, but fails to heat-out his predator and calls in a beagle to finish the job.

I love you as a physicist searches for a solution to time in seductive algorithm-filled notebooks—feeble attempts to unwed the dimension from space. I love you as a teenager searches for acne solutions, powdering make-up over mounds of aching red spots, exacerbating the problem until discovering bottles of benzoyl peroxide and a prescription to Accutane.

Don’t forget the psychological check-up, Ma!

I am crazier than honeybees who can’t find their way back, wondering is the hive really their home or is it in the trees and flower buds sucking the sweet juice off corn all day until home is irrelevant.
Garbage Poem

You are a smelly raccoon with 5 babies
all named Ashley or Ty.
I like your beady eyes and cute
mask, but it’s time you
stop digging in
my garbage exposing a half
eaten McDonald’s burger paper towels
soaked with spilt
coffee and the Coca-Cola
can I meant to recycle.
How to Go Green

gobble up the corn
flanked rows of cobbled
hopes knee-high by July
the dental plan fails—pick the kernels from my own teeth—spit them
down the drain  wash them back to the water
treatment plant hidden over the river and through the woods
to eat more stake and eggs we go
meat you at the corner store, but everyone knows
any store worth shopping requires a parking lot with no fewer than one thousand
spaces.

Look at me, I’m Walmart
demanding eco-ratings so won’t you be my neighbor
everything you need in one stop, self-check-out
line  my suburbs have suburbs, baby
I’m a pest and you’re a pest,
let’s call the whole thing off.
Dumpster Radio

1.
What the universe looks like: sand through an hour gas
haunts the vacuum of our lives.
Hand guide maps drawn from memory space
until orifices
fill up with bubble juice, postcard, shoe inserts, coffee
cup, beer boxes, last year’s cell phone, analogue camera, empty jar, broken water
bottle, fake flowers gaze
over the edge

notebooks, paperback books, hardback
books, journals, note pads, calendar
each filled or ready to be filled with words, doodles, numbers, dates
to the void

the world is full of things, who can picture
nothing when
even astronauts have ice-cream.

Meanwhile, get lost in the expansion
2.

Disco balls shine brightly
in eyes, overstimulate your optic nerve—

in video, pleasant like underwater star gazing

from the bottom of a pool to watch
slanted light rays and crescent ripples expand
to the edge
until orifices lungs tighten when out of air
explode up, carbon
dioxide out
3.

Every memory will be stored forever on the internet
camera out
things lost because of holidays just as many gained,
expand—

Now full of objects or sense
filling up with blogs and every person finds their niche…

Meanwhile, get lost in the expansion
dissonance beautiful to the ear
sound’s waves parallel light waves but slower.
Outward bound all the way
to brink.
Part 2:
Bed, Breath and Beyond
The Memory Machine

I built a machine in the basement of my brain stem.
every memory stored on a perfect reel for replay,
pull a lever to convert files into complete
holograms. Let’s smell and interact
while I live all lives at once. Push buttons
to make Duplicates of Me so I act out
all the lives and follow every
option to its end—death!

Get sick of a life—Present Me
pulls the reel off The Machine
and tosses it back into The Bin.
There’s no method
to The Bin—a tangled mess of celluloid spools,
but if I can’t find one, I grab
the master reel of me tossing reels.

An ethical dilemma arises in all
choices. Feeling bad for the left-out memories,
destroying of stories, and poor old
Present Me only runs The Machine.
Afraid of the Dark

it’s the transitory atmosphere
everyone is lookin’ for, but rotten
to the cerebral cortex. The stuff of rock
ballads for girls’ and boys’ first slow-
dance—before whisked away in minivans.

Excuse me, this ain’t it! Squirming
guts, pulling at threads, and that tighten-up
breath. Don’t call, don’t call—dark
black scarf romance starts at the ears and wraps
down around torso. Unwrap when
well seasoned.
Twin Scars

Dimmy lights sterile scrambled egg faces
hover above me—I’m still awake.
Scalpel peels the fleshy
surface of my abdomen
and squishes in my cartoon guts—

raises three inch diagonal scar,
to the right of my belly button—
a pink silky beauty queen slash.

We jut hips toward one another lift
one side of my t-shirt
show bare skin, run
fingers along a knife’s old hole lean a little
to the left to accentuate my lines
You step out of the turquoise 1992 Ford Taurus—still suited. Toss your briefcase aside. Lunge toward the ground at a squirrel. Squeeze hands to fists. Squirrel guts ooze out between fingers. You should be more careful because squirrels are backyard rodents and carry diseases or don’t be careful because it causes more stress to worry, depleting your immune system and making you more susceptible to illness. There’s one less squirrel in the back yard. The soup we ate for dinner was adequate. Not your best, but ok.
Cloud Jam

A mile above the ground, we hang in bungees
harvest the clouds’ pennies
undress congested landmarks
in the name of charity.

Across the bay a serene view of the city’s skyscrapers—
not all that tall. We are sitting above them.
A plane flies low and straight
into the building—we dangle unscathed.

You explain how the plane was a reenactment of 9/11
so everyone could remember how it felt and those who missed it can
feel the noise, too. I am nauseated. We quit
gathering pennies and are lowered down.

A man with the charity yells because we didn’t
collect enough pennies but I’m through.
Now Hiring

Only blondes sat at these dumb cafeteria tables
under strobe lights. I had to hire all new workers.
I tried to talk to a few of the blondes but they snubbed me.

Unavailable applicant brunettes sent poems instead of resumes
but all the poems stunk except “Kroger”.
It was a grocery store, but not really—it was a poem.
A machine of picture
words and moveable parts.

I plucked a bottle of perfume from the page
sprayed my neck
rubbed my wrists
a light but sultry buttery taste
Ocean Shelf Tour

Our tour guide to the bottom of the ocean explained

Be Careful—
Tap on the wrong spot the whole ocean floor may collapse into itself
killing miles "sea life"
A common mistake made by millionaire adventurers
thought they knew enough
out on their own.

we work on the oil
well—underwater diving lessons turned into a job.
dropped a bag the pool into the ocean.
the bag of sledgehammers sunk straight to the bottom
try to catch it dragging me down too and I didn’t have an air tank on yet.
Part 3:

The Steamy Meta
Where a pop for each of my toes
Gives away my agency
Night=quiet darkness spreading
Over
an earth I don’t use big words to describe
because I only know what the earth looks like from TV
if I didn’t know we were spinning on an axis around a ball of fiery gas
night would scare me more
I’ll blame it on my ancestors

Frigidity seeps in
quilting the noisiest space.
footsteps pound
above me and I wait for hacking to resonate
in the walls, but there is none.

I won’t write the things in the dark that scare me
Or I will have to hide under the covers. Then
I was at a hospital and while a nurse and an old woman were walking me to my car when the old women explained "I don't see the world in normal time constraints anymore. It's as though all of time has passed and now god is looking back on all the white smiling grins."

I drowned despite being an excellent swimmer.

I became dehydrated and died of thirst. A nurse told me that 90 percent of deaths are from dehydration.

My teeth crumble and break. Sometimes they fall out and I end up chewing my own teeth.

I’ve been married three times and every time it’s the wrong man and I’m wearing the wrong dress.

My house was haunted child. The stairs bare and creaky. Oscar, a witch, and some other scary characters held meetings underneath.

My sister has died several times. I was the only one. Once I couldn’t stop hitting.

I went to a water park with my friend Monica. Despite the ferocious waterslides I was happy to see her. We decided we had been visiting. I fear this will too soon be the only place we visit.
I dreamed about my grandma and she told me something important but it wasn't something that could be written down… it just felt like peace.

I am often standing up and pushed against a wall when I dream about sex, but only when I’m with a partner I’ve never had in real life.

I am under the covers when I have sex with a known partner.

When I was five years old I fell down a hole with my favorite cartoon characters three times. The bottom were colored doors locked in the one at the end; when we were saved I forgot my gig-gee so I returned for it, but everyone was gone how to get home.

I tasted the most perfect chocolate once and haven’t been satisfied since.

I’ve had a penis and been turned on by myself.

A sickly old man on a bench with a ill little boy who he was stroking seductively.

Reality TV strangled me. I was aware I gasped for air.

I delivered a baby in a collapsing tower because the world was ending. My mom held my hand and the doctor left before the afterbirth.

I have the naked dream but most of the time it’s only from the waist up.
Before I could drive, I’d get stuck behind a car wheel and would be out of control.

I was bit by a vampire and turned a vampire. I didn’t want to be a vampire and kill people, but had to for survival. I was running from the government agents sent to destroy us. We used a green pod vehicle to travel around the core of the earth.

Tornados chase me and I can never run at my full speed when they do.

I flew to Europe. At our hub the bathroom was filthy and I threw up all over it from the idea of having to use one of the toilets. I couldn’t find we were fucking under sheets in a hotel room. the hotel’s pool, but forgot my in children so on the run from the hotel staff.

I pee for long lengths of time and feel relieved only to have to pee more.

My parents were getting a divorce two really sleazy people hanging around that were interested visited me and then decided to visit, too. watched from my bed while hugged me. It was frigid in the barn loft with a few others. In the dark, the beds were comfortable and warm. trying to kiss some blond guy. He liked it.

I rode a blue motorcycle on curvy country roads with trees and snow everywhere. only time while driving in a dream. neighbors bossing me and crying. The church
booked two weddings and performed both at once. Everyone was getting married. I fix it. I was in the fetal position sobbing on the floor and everyone was standing around wondering what I was doing. A man knelt down beside me and kissed me on the cheek.

I dreamed someone came back with me to my bedroom that I didn’t really know. We were fooling around, but he became obsessed with getting off and getting me off. He yelled frightened and knew hurting me unless the sex went well, so I had to keep him hard and keep fucking I hid under my bed.

Still in try to scream but only breath escapes.

Aliens took over the world and he invented space guns to save us, too late because the world flooded and we were pirates.

I watched the refinery explode and we evacuated to a lake north of town. It was night and the leaves by the lake were glowing fall colors from the fallout. Dad went back on his bike for sandwiches and left us some animal crackers.
I'm in the middle of a battle against women from another world.

There are fists, spears.

A woman is stabbed. When the women warriors kill they take her back to where it’s an all-women world. They love each other don’t have lovers.

I survive the long battle. The could have killed me, is an athletic tall, with a futuristic blonde bob. they will take me back I don’t get used to the idea. if I want to enjoy my next life in they must know of my that not even I know. I need to empty my bowels so my body gives. Because need the excrement too, I have to find a special toilet that will send it.

It’s grey in my neighborhood where there are play-acting-battles all in an arena made of trees and trellises just beyond park’s woods and ravines.

I trek into a ravine and the toilet. It appears as a ruin or My friend decides incredibly disrespectful to poop but he doesn’t know or that it’s really not it leads to the other world. Despite he stays and I can’t use Instead the toilet-relic crumbles back

search for another train tracks covered by dead leafage run through the ravine. The toilet subtly sprouts in-between tracks. It’s
shape of a lily. The hole in the center is protected by the two layers of petals and leads
to squat over it, but they want to examine the glass-flower-toilet like it’s a museum exhibit.

In my mind, I call to the leader for help. She responds—in my mind—with a mantra. I silently repeat, “”. I expect but instead a train roars down the tracks. everyone else screams and scatters. The train ghosts right through me while I use the toilet.

leader explains I will kill someone specific but won’t know who until it’s time. I ask, “at what level of conscious will I operate in the new world” and she answers “At about 40%”. Which is ok, but disappointing.

more cognizant and only partially hazy.

The play-battle begins quickly progresses into battle. A blond attacks my friend. some violent history with her, I want to hurt him, but am only ready to kill because I need to He is climbing up the east wall after my friend while I frantically look for my spear. The leader is frustrated with me for losing the spear she gave me to kill the blond guy, but I know I didn’t lose it. The kill must be done with the spear for me to enter their world.

I find the spear against the back wall with the rest I go to the trellis and stab at him, but the spear is long and heavy and I’m not agile I miss and hit the wall so hard that the whole trellis falls down trapping him underneath. Stabbing, I pierce him hard in the chest. My friend crawls away. I keep stabbing afraid that he’ll jolt up at me like in horror-flicks. both sides, has stopped to watch because what I’ve done is vicious Nods from their leader tells me that it’s time Soon will stab me and take me with them. My left shoulder aches in anticipation.
Part 4:
No Preservatives
or Social Networking Cites
We Only Want to Play Girls

In the next few years 156,000 male chromosome will be extinct.

y chromosomes is depleating. Destruction or pesticide Growth hormone.

This is good news and bad
No news or news » There are no news

Inspiration will be here earlier
prepared the day with a handful of people have sleeping
around is the evolution of extinction
Resist monogamy.

Our genetic code has already been established,
the world katastrofisch not human.

Together with other women has been pretty good. Once the people around,
we do not love that we enjoyin our lake.

A man in respect of 15.6 million years…
more than ever. She is the reverse of bees,

but the blessing and a curse being held in high security
zone, so it will not catch any diseases.
When he grew up his work September 5 impregnation of women can only see the most fertile women.

Freeze their sperm's genetic test to see if. Some children — Barings women who have the best physical birth.

The man would really hate his work, but it will not be able to work at the end of the day's search and nurses in his circle and his thumbsucking. Thumb.
Rapture Bachelor

The mark will be a bar code, and the number will be

Who wore it best?

The adjoining of the Bar code will be an integral part of the

who wore it best system.

Another Romance Vs. Bromance, that has been designed to work along with the “smart card”
is called “vein reading.”

The system uses the veins in the back of the wrist to certify that the person presenting unconsciously over inflates their own physical appearance.

the card is authorized to use it.
The microchip in a smart card is significantly more likely to choose a more attractive morphed face than their own non-morphed face!

can retain incredible amounts of information. A 4 Meg chip, quite common today, can hold the equivalent of 16,000 pages of single space texts!

Celebrity look alike: Cate Blanchett, Katy Perry and the equivalent of 16,000 pages of single space texts!

These “cashless society” hot relationships are ready to Spring Forward into effect soon!!!
25 Random Things About Me

i use
I feel I must
I never
I still love to
I believe
I like
i like
I like
I really like it
I don’t like
I don’t like to make
I don’t generally like

but I also like to eat
I find
I think
I hate these
I have
i have the nerves
i loved
I realized
i genuinely enjoy
I don't mind it
I sing
I reverse
I used to lie
i was born
I wish it
where I find myself

I already am not
I am not a big fan

I make sure
i get weepy listening
I watch everything
I enjoy
I really enjoy

I worked
i swam
I gave
I dreamed
I wouldn't
I do them
I don't care.

i was 13
so I can skip
I will never
I love making

when i was
I'm not narcissistic
I do them because
I sometimes wonder
i wash my
I talk to
so I don’t
5 Card Dream Draw

2
i travel
a nude art model
the other dimension
around
i jumped in playing

off a piece of flesh

7
—a good duet—we
stole it shoving
wanted
a nude art model
on the jukebox then

with the slopping
teeth in my finger
with a curtain
out of my pockets/pulled up
a nude art model
ghosts right through

the other dimension
it was before
redsocks

8
red socks
of those picture booths
the queen tells
a big screen
the last battle

in my mind—in my head
wanted
in my mind—in my head
the other dimension
an all world party
tofu hotdogs

video casting
i’m sprawled out

6
to play
woke up heavy
stole it shoving
we weren’t really/film noir but we
at the edge

like cutting silky cheese
wanted
in my mind—in my head
red socks
at the edge
stole it shoving
tune

a nude art model
like cutting a silky cheese

9
ghosts right through me
what we know
out of my pockets/pulled up
the essential elements
i sprawled out

it was before
wanted
my legs to kick her
back to their world next time
video casting
ghost right through
to play

a big screen
squat over it
mind scream

3
on the jukebox and then
mind scream
that old witches
—a good duet—we
video casting

the essential elements
thin with a cropped
while I asked the
—a good duet—we
with the slopping
mind scream
a nude art model

the essential elements

16
thin with cropped
around
—a good duet—we
i’m sprawled out
watch one grow

teeth in my finger
the other dimension
it was before
from another world
the other dimension
a big screen
watch because
teeth in my finger
out of my pockets/pulled up
i jumped in playing

one car
squat over it
the other dimension
thin with a cropped
in my mind—in my head
to play

it was before
the queen tells
a big screen
we weren’t really/film noir but we
i travel
an all world party
like cutting a silky cheese
to play
from another world
watch one grow

4
with a curtain
video casting
like cutting a silky cheese
everyone else
it was before

i travel
the other dimension
at the edge
with the slopping
around
mind scream
crumbles back

an all world party
we weren’t really/film noir but we

on a couch
i jumped in playing
woke up heavy
what we know
mind scream

the essential elements
it’s almost time
done is vicious but good
wanted
back to their world next time
teeth in my finger

we went to do it.
Afterword: Poems Take Their Clothes Off

“The Steamy Meat” approaches dream re-telling through textual manipulation. While “Noc-turne” is blacking-out and hiding text, “The Mystic Toilet” is less obviously whiting out text that is part of the narrative retelling.

The last section, “No Preservatives or Social Networking Cites,” is made up of poems generated by several different processes.

“We Only Want to Play Girls” was sent repeatedly through an online translation program.

“Rapture Bachelor” relies on found materials I gathered in transit (subway, airplane, walking) and lines I wrote while in transit. I used number-based chance operations to merge each document into one. The final piece is a cut-up of the resulting text.

The material for “25 Random Things About Me” was drawn from responses to a wildly popular Facebook chain letter. I collaged 30 individuals’ responses to the prompt (this poem uses only the first answer my Facebook Friends gave to the prompt).

“5 Card Dream Draw” selects phrases from notes I took on my dreams over the course of a month. I choose phrases and posted 13 snippets of language onto four 3X5 index cards. I assigned each phrase to a playing card and proceeded to play the poker game 5-card-draw by myself, drawing one hand at a time, then reshuffling the cards. Lines are ordered according to the cards that came up. I hoped to imitate the chance nature of dreams rather than their narrative retelling.