

Transcribed from Still Alice

By Rebecca Arrowsmith

Only months ago, my mom held a glass of white wine.

Night flight to San Francisco. Chase the moon across America...

She had a lecture in L.A., so we met for lunch.

God. It's been years since I've been on a plane.

She told I should go to college. She wrapped two fingers around the stem and swirled her glass, a whirlpool of wine twisting in her palm. Acting might make me happy, but it's no real career. "I can make my own choices," I told her, and she responded, "And on whose dime?" Then looked at me like she did when I was ten or nine or thirteen or eleven. Whenever I was defiant. The look that comes with *Excuse me missy?* Or, through clinched teeth, *Would you like to rephrase that?*

Now she looks into a cup, clasped in both of her hands. I know she is listening to my monologue, always listening, but she might interrupt me to mumble in a language nobody will ever understand. She lifts the cup the same way a baby would a warm bottle. It lingers. She listens.

When we hit 35,000 feet we'll have reached the tropopause...

The great belt of calm air.

As close as I'll ever get to the ozone. I dreamed we were there.

The plane leapt the tropopause...

the safe air and attained the outer rim...

*the ozone which was ragged and torn...
patches of it threadbare as old cheesecloth
and that was...*

Frightening.

I imagine the playwright of *Angels in America* searching for joy in his home. A thread of gold weaved between racism, homophobia, the Cold War. God knows what else.

Times that felt so hopeless to everybody.

Days that felt lost, dank, sinking in the sand on a dark ocean floor.

Like family, with a disease like this.

I'm afraid to glance at her. Her eyes are always rubbed pink, and searching. For her to watch me without knowing that I am performing. Without knowing that I am her daughter at all...

Her eyes will never ask "On whose dime?" or "Would you like to rephrase that?" They hold no words. They barely babble.

If I could explain a meaning to her now, I'd tell her how the playwright wrote: *Heaven is a city not unlike San Francisco*. The night flight is to Heaven. The staging is a single spotlight on me, sitting in an airplane seat.

Surrounded by bodies, feeling alone.

*But I saw something only I could see...
because of my astonishing ability to see such things.*

Her gaze is tipsy, bobbing to the floor, and the instability of it pulls lines from my memory so easily that I let the script go limp in my hands.

Souls were rising...

Our eyes, hands of Sistine Chapel – wordless and delicate, loving and reaching.

From the earth far below...

*souls of the dead, of people who'd
perished from...*

*famine, from war, from the plague...
and they floated up like skydivers in reverse.
Limbs all akimbo*

Wheeling and spinning.

*And the souls of these departed
joined hands...
clasped ankles and formed a web*

A great net of souls.

*And the souls were three atom oxygen
molecules of the stuff of ozone...*

*The outer rim absorbed them,
and was repaired.*

Breathe.

Because nothing is lost forever.

Breathe.

*In this world, there is a kind of
painful progress.
Longing for what we've left behind and
dreaming ahead.
At least I think that's so.*

Close the script. “That’s it.”

A tiny contortion forms around her nose and mouth. Her head bows as if she were about to sneeze. But she doesn’t sneeze. She leans, hesitant and creating distance between us... distance that I once was so desperate for. I walk through it.

“Hey - ” Trying to lullaby cohesiveness from her, I ask: “Did you like that?”

We share breath. We look into each other like a mirror – she at a younger self. Me at a worn face, a naive smile. “What I just read. Did you like it?”

She smiles, “Moonmmuhm.”

“Mmm.” I hum back, almost like a question. “What... what was it about?”

“Lougf,” she nods. “Ehe. Love.”

“Yeah Mom,” I know she’s in there somewhere. “It’s about love.”