

# Leslie Maryann Neal



When I was a child, I could breathe underwater.  
I could swim through smoothness,  
far to the other end of the pool  
breathing air bubbles caught in my nose.  
I never told anyone about this strange ability,  
these imagined gills. I was a secret mermaid  
walking land, my tail and fins unnoticed.

Now I plunge into the deep end and fear devours  
me with the water. I come to the surface  
coughing, panicked at the space beneath my feet.

The dark sky doesn't end with the land.  
I am treading water in it, the ten feet around me  
is infinite space. I am suspended like a satellite,  
light glinting off my surfaces. My eyes stinging,  
I watch my t-shirt flow in the zero gravity.

I am breathing only air, pushing through water  
with only arms and legs; my fins are gone.  
I'm just a girl with amphibian memories.  
I am trying to swim.

Leslie Maryann Neal is the author of two books: *I Want to Be a Bad Girl* on Inevitable Press and *Paper-Thin Hearts* on Tangent Girl Press. She has been a guest poet at Beyond Baroque, Loyola Marymount University and the Comedy Store and has featured for the Valley Contemporary Poets, Poetic License, Ruta Maya in Austin, and the Irritable Tribe of Poets in Tampa, to name a few. In December, 2001, she was named a Best Bet in the OC Weekly. She misses swimming.

