

Invitations

My daughter receives an invitation in the mail,
white lace flowers pressed against rich, velvet red,
tender swirls more pronounced by darkness.
Sweet letters, carefully written by a child,
who held the pen steady to spell out
my daughter's name and address
on the envelope.

With honor in her eyes,
she ceremoniously opens this gift at dinner,
carefully so as not to tear precious paper
more than necessary.

She's invited to a friend's 8th birthday party.

"Eight!" her dad exclaims,
as if that is too old a crowd
for his little girl.
Forgetting that this girl
turns eight herself in just six months.

Precious moments of forgetting.

Yesterday she crawled across the floor,
heavy diaper dragging against hardwood,
pulling herself by arms of sweet, doughy flesh,
victorious upon nearly reaching a ball
that slips just beneath her touch.

Smiling and trying again and again,
patterns of near victory and loss,
joyous Sisyphean play.

Yesterday she laughed without stopping when I peeped at her
from behind my own fingers.

Yesterday she sat for hours in a stroller
watching birds and leaves float through autumnal air
in awe of so much movement.

Yesterday she clung to my neck
not wanting to let go,
not wanting to release into the depths of solitary sleep.

And when she awoke,
we hugged simultaneously,
having missed each other through the night
simultaneously.

At dinner, I ask her,
“Can you please not get older than this?”
And she asks in return
with seriousness more adult than child
in the calm of deep brown eyes,
“How do I do that?”
Because she really wants to know.
Because since hearing the notion of growing up,
she has said with solemnity,
“I want to stay a child forever.”
Knowing that moving through these doors of maturation

takes her further from this spot
on the floor
next to me
where we sit for hours,
that become years.

And I want that too,
for her to stay the child who sits so close
and listens to me tell her the beauty of the world,
the beauty that I see.

When it occurs to her
that her parents will die before she does,
likely from a conversation with a friend,
she is sobered by the concept.
Pondering for weeks.

Then in the middle of the mundane,
while putting on glitter shoes with velcro straps,
she says to me
with certainty,
as if finally decided,
“I will not kill myself when you die.”
Somber words for one so young.

As if dying was an option.
As if she has made the choice to live
at seven years of age.

But I know what she does not:
when it comes time to edge from my embrace,

she will want to.

My arms will feel too heavy
on her soft and graceful neck.

She'll need to breathe her air.
find her fragrance, breath, and song.

She'll then define what is beautiful to her.

And this will all come naturally:
Nature's invitations to precious growing children.