2018

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In early morning, as you run down the hall tumbling over the rug, clutching a stuffed animal, I can't help but toss you over my shoulder, your fly-away curls blind both of us, your squeals sling down my ear, the notes peal sharper than winter air.

You hop down and toe into the kitchen, pleased that I now understand your raised finger, your whispered plea cup of milk, cup of milk.

You came into our lives like a bird flying out of a magician’s fiery pot. Your wings and rhythms forming somewhere else. What did you do with what you left behind? Are scarves and jump ropes winding you through an antemortal wormhole or tipping point?

For you, the only tip is a head moving forward, no going back to a fist in the mouth or smacking gums or cells quick to divide.

Yet occasionally I go back, attempting to piece together your essence with the verbal splashes I hear now. How a blueprint exists for each house and a mathematician knows the endlessness of a line. Even when you aren't here, I still hear footsteps down the hall.

—Mark D. Bennion

This poem won third place in the 2018 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest sponsored by BYU Studies.