

## ALL FALL DOWN

The first three days of Kindergarten  
I didn't play with blocks  
splash color on big sheets of paper  
or tell a story about my cat or dog.  
I hid under a table in the corner.  
At story time, the other children  
were enraptured by the plot  
enthralled by the teacher's honeyed voice.  
I listened where I couldn't see the book.  
At naptime, I did not sleep.  
When the other kids drank milk  
and ate graham crackers, the teacher  
slid whatever crackers were unwanted  
broken, dusty, in their waxed paper wrapper  
across the floor to me  
like I was an animal in a cage.

I begged my mother and father  
to please not send me back to school.  
What was the point of dressing and undressing dolls  
or pushing toy cars across the rug?  
They told me there was no way out—  
I had to go.

I lasted two and a half days  
then I slowly crawled out  
from under the table and walked toward the class  
but I almost turned back  
when the teacher crooned:  
"Oh, look who's joining us."  
But it was too late  
because the other kids unlinked  
their arms and let me join their circle.  
As one unbroken chain  
we danced, singing merrily:

*Ring around the rosies,  
A pocketful of posies.  
ashes to ashes.  
We all fall down!*

Then we got up  
and did it all over again.

## PROMISE

As sunlight begins to lighten the windows  
promise that whatever happens this day  
at the end of it, we will meet back here.

Let us agree that tonight, as the moon  
and the earth take one more turn around the park  
we will sleep in each other's arms.

Promise me that as the ocean ships sail out to sea  
and the stars rush farther and farther apart  
as the rainforests disappear

and civilizations rise and fall  
we will dream of a luminous future  
in which we love each other forever thus.

## CHASING DELIGHT

I have spent my life chasing delight  
until I'm turned around, exhausted.  
Chasing delight is like trying to touch  
the aurora borealis, build your house  
under a rainbow, grasp a falling star.  
Now, I think it's not something you pursue  
but let catch up to you, like my baby daughter  
who wobbles up the sidewalk to me.  
It's everyday around you  
not spectacular but ordinary.  
It's what holds my daughter's attention:  
the glint off the chrome of a car bumper  
the shimmer of the hot asphalt street  
her reflection in the toy store window  
me tall behind her. Delight is a view  
you can only see when you're not looking—  
a star out the corner of your eye.  
Lightning, the smell of rain in the summer air—  
a firefly's flash, the glint of a fish scale  
the trace of a sparkler on the Fourth of July.  
Delight is my baby daughter, fresh  
out of the bath, warm, wrapped in a terrycloth towel  
smelling of talcum powder, her eyes gleaming  
so very alive, so very much just there.

## OCTOBER

Yellow leaves fall across black trunks onto the grass.  
There seems to an endless supply.  
Beauty in the watching.

When we first met yellow leaves were falling.  
There seemed to be an endless supply.  
Beauty in their passing.

## A DAUGHTER'S GOOD NIGHT PRAYER

Are you washing tonight?  
I know it's late  
but if you are, could you please wash these jeans?  
It's an emergency.  
I'm making three piles for you here on the floor:  
shrink a lot, can't shrink at all, and wash normal.  
Is this navy sweater a dark?  
Never mind, you can decide later.  
This new shirt I just bought—it's very, very important  
that you really, really shrink it  
or I need to return it, but I can't because I lost the receipt  
and I cut off the tags.  
So, put it in hot, hot, *hot* water and shrink it, or is it cold water?  
—whatever you need to do.  
But this pink shirt, you can't shrink at all  
because if it shrinks, even the teeniest bit, I can't wear it.  
And this tank top, don't shrink because it's not mine—  
I borrowed it from Lisa.  
And make sure you wash this jean skirt  
'cause it will look so good with my white belt.  
Can you do that?  
I need these all by tomorrow.  
But don't start yet. Wait ten minutes—  
I might have more to throw down.  
And wake me up at 6:45, no 6:30  
because I still have to decide what to wear tomorrow.  
Thank you so, so much.  
Bless your soul.