

Babysitter

Tonight, as I slide
Sleeping Beauty pj's over her skin,
I will ask a two year old
to stretch arms over head, except
I will not look at her, I will hide
how little I know. I will think
of the other men and women
sliding pj's over other tiny bodies
in other little and big cities, under
other bathroom lights and bedroom lamps,
(except for the men and women
without bathroom lights
and bedroom lamps – but maybe
the Sleeping Beauty pj's, yes
definitely the Sleeping Beauty pj's) all staring
at the ceiling, a community
of ceiling starers – afraid
of a two (or three or four) year old
who will gaze up in worship
and see that we (silly us) have no idea
what we (crazy us) are doing. I will not look
at her. They quickly slip cold hands into sleeves
trying to make the moment less disastrous,
less horrific, but they will forget seeing you
and I (bill-payers-tennis-shoe-wearers-got-life-
wrapped-around-our-thumb-wisdom-bearers) in a moment
of dumbfounded idiocy, a knowledgeless moment,
as soon as we pat them on the head.

But isn't it nice
to know that you aren't the only one
staring at the ceiling and isn't it nice
to know she's not the only child
losing her faith in absolute truths.

I scoot the small of her back
toward the bedroom door
specked with purple and red flowers,
(just as you scoot your him or her
across the hardwood floor or
freshly cleaned and freshly stained mauve
maroon, or sea-foam green carpeting)
I close her hand around an apple juice sippy cup

and turn off the light. Tonight I will
thank God I am only a substitute,
in an hour I can leave
this intelligently frightful creature,
her flowered door,
and her apple juice sippy cup
to other ceiling starers who will think
isn't it nice they aren't the only ones
staring at the ceiling, who will think
isn't it nice that she's not the only child
losing her faith in absolute truths,
who will wake tomorrow
and ask her to stretch
arms over head to remove
Sleeping Beauty pj's christened
with an apple juice drip.