

If the Heart Asks for Pleasure First

My daughter emerges from
the pastel cocoon
of her room
through the ticking
of the hallway clock
floats down the stairs
into the dusk
as the stream of possible lovers begins

I still imagine her slender bones
need cradling
her body light as a dragonfly
skeletal recesses like a soft-shelled crab
an easy mark
for crushing

her face mine, ours
the tendrils of youth
still visible
her separateness a gift
tied with the full weight
of my heart-salt

as she enters the night sky
orchid and indigo
the evening news tells stories

Rishma Dunlop

of clipped wings, small coffins
the earth scarred with grief
hearts opened and closed

and I am reminded of what I know
that there is nothing stronger
than to be helpless before desire
knowing that moment when
the heart must answer yes
when there is no longer
any choice but assent

tonight at my desk
covered with papers
scraps of poems
every alphabet my child
my heart stops and starts in the dark
until the sound of her key in the lock
my necessary lullaby