

SHARA MCCALLUM

Dear Hours

1.

We are the body moving toward demise;
we are the soul, remnant of another life.

And always, rain tapping on a zinc roof
is the sound of fingers thrumming flesh.

Always, I return
to the things of this world, tethered.

You, who have come to me
from something, somewhere, I cannot name;

you who have a voice that does not speak
any language I know yet unfurls bright wings,

alighting in each corner of this house;
you who are mine and not mine,

tell me the answers
while there is time.

2.

At Rosh Hashanah, I dip apples in honey,
bargaining for a happy New Year.

I use my teeth to separate bitter from sweet.
I chew on hope, insist its name is faith.

The weight of stones thrown into the river
to cast away sins,

this fruit in my palm whispers *ripening*
in the same breath as *ruin*.

Apple, I say to my daughter, meaning
the thing I wish to be that is not.

Apple, Apple, Apple, my one-year old parrots,
demanding I place it on her tongue.

3.

Tired, the toddler tip-toes on padded feet.
She pitter-pats on feeted pads.

She whistles and warbles.
She burbles and bobbles.

A slug on its trail of silver,
she slooches down the hall.

A spider dangling from its last thread,
she pauses at the staircase edge.

At eighteen months, what does she know
of danger, the possible fall?

4.

Today your mouth, cheeks, the single curl
escaping your woolen hat

conjure a snapshot of me at your age:
bangled baby, head in a kerchief,

propped on a dark green lawn,
inscrutable gaze taking on the camera.

My snowflake-eating bundle of mischief
and yet-to-be-learned grief,

squealing tangle of two-year-old limbs,
spinning galaxy of self-self-self,

you totter off your sled,
only to resurface a moment later,

as if buoyed by invisible waves.

5.

From the garden, my three-year-old
plucks a zinnia,

almost snapping
the ring of petals off its stem.

At her age in a different place
I picked ixoras,

gathering the small blossoms,
one by one, to build a crown of flames.

If I could read my life
backward, or hers forward,

it might begin
the moment the future is written

in a child's need to possess
such a red,

or in her offering
of a flower that will not last

the hour I stand it in a vase,
propping its neck.