

First Flight: For Jesse

For years I have left you at thresholds—
walked you to the edge of the pool on the first day
of lessons, stood outside the door
your first day of school.

This is a mother's life, this nudge
of love and fear and relief in one deep breath.
Like fish swimming against the water's flow,
you have fought and floated,
I have hurried and held.

Today was another rite in this journey.
I left you at the boarding gate,
watched you in too-short jeans (four inches you
shot up this summer) hand the flight attendant
your ticket.

No last kiss for me, no hug—
a smile of eight-year-old bravado and a long look
were all I took from the airport as your plane
became a smudge in God's eye.

Storms over St. Louis have grounded you indefinitely
though the sky above those clouds is filled with stars.
I know you will see them;
for you the holy dancer's veils will part
and the moon will welcome your fledgling self
as I would.

Jesse, each star has a name
and dreamers have wished on them since time began.
If, white knuckled, you wish I were there,
know I am waiting as always outside the door—
here on the far side of the clouds,

praying God breathes gently tonight,
praying God breathes gently for you.

