

Your 18th Birthday: 3 poems

A Night's Visit (to C.M.G.)

It's your 18th birthday
and we trade roles - I am
a child again. Sinking into
the floor, I watch as the house

becomes filled with wild beasts
that Psychology can't fit its lasso
over. Your breath hastily
becomes several gnats circling

around my head and Time
becomes the way we shake our
hands and say goodbye to
the flaws we've grown

so used to. I sleep on the
couch and in the morning,
I'm an adult again, pausing by
the mirror to touch my face.

I look into your room to see if
the magic tumbled out of our
pact and if you had turned into
a child again, but you

were already gone.

The Heat of the Candles

Your 18th birthday: it was late and cold, and rang in my ears.
But the time was past 11 when I finally figured it out and
remembered that you're no longer a child, but you really
haven't been for a long time – instead,
you've been the strange scents of sweat,
soap and the cakey mixture of lipstick and black
eyeliner. You've been the heat of tears, but not
the form or
consistency. Not the body, or *of*
the body.

You have been the spirit causing static on the phone.

You have been the roads of Ohio, leaking into Michigan
and I'm getting closer to accepting it, but still
kicking against admission.

It was your 18th birthday, the stale and chalky aftertaste of
balloons, each colour breaking on
the dull needles of December's draft
as it slithered into the house - slipping past
the door and our defenses, before pausing at the
shy heat of the unsuspecting candles...

Frozen

It is your
birthday, your
18th birthday and the water is
frozen on Lac Saint Claire, even though
I'm not there to see it.
I remember that I used to
wonder what the fish did when it
grew so cold and they couldn't possibly survive
under that thick crust of ice. But then my father cut
a hole and I could smell life slipping out from the murky pit,
and threw a line into it...

I carefully peel your picture out of the album - smoothing the
small scratches near your shy, smiling face. You're still 16 to me,
trapped under that thick crust of loss, under the rough cough
that we've suffered over these last few years. But
under the darkness of that hole, you're celebrating,
you're feeling the hot flicker of the birthday candles,
you're licking the smudged layer of German
chocolate frosting, you're feeling your way forward,
and out in this vast snowy world, I'm the only
one who's lost, still looking
for signs of life in the
open gash of ice...