

## Negative Space

For Stella, age 9

How does it feel to be you,  
child of mystery and unknowing?

Your words sluice from cross-wired brain neurons  
firing in all directions twisted tongue  
larynx pharynx mulish

I don't understand so you lob the same words at me again,

stones that bruise (like the time you punched my eye) — pierce, slice, flay  
bits strewn we only frustration like broken-edged glass slashed

The winter elms hurl their black arms into the sky,  
branches flung with a random grace.

*I don't know which I love more,  
black limbs or sapphire shards.*

They are flawless until spring,  
when dying boughs jut awkwardly  
next to sibling branches soft with green,  
all thrust into unfathomable blue.

Do you know your mind is in fragments?

You too begin to bud,  
body obedient to this one natural rhythm,  
while speech and understanding lag, refuse to grow.

*I'm afraid I'm making you into a thing.*

You too will slice the sky,  
whirl in wind-gusts,  
green and thrust  
a waterfall of giggles over your shoulder as you run  
into a world our form-wired brains  
can barely comprehend—  
always too fast, always away from us.

Shirley Sullivan  
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