

Graduation

Marilyn Bushman-Carlton

As morning breaks, our daughter,
wearing her best blue dress, is too excited to eat.
The wasted Cheerios bob like buoys in her bowl.

Though I've tried to tell her
that we have not been notified,
or invited to the school assembly—
that she is not one of the ten chosen
for the award—

she won't believe me.
She thinks I'm maximizing her surprise.

Other years when they'd paraded the winners,
THEN, when she'd resolved to make that honor hers—
THAT would have been the time to talk:
about what's advertised
versus what's in stock.

We could have used a visual: a tower
of sifted flour reaching high
from a measuring cup, then cut to size
with a blunt butter knife.

We, too, thought she'd win,
thought now she'll go boldly on to junior high.

We should have sat her down
and told her that nothing is certain,
that after the clapping evaporates
they won't remember your name.

We should have said
that having paid with dedication
she'd still be up among the best.

It would have been a comfortable time
to discuss how to descend.