

LETTER BEGUN TO MY FUTURE NIECE

your well-loved heart will learn  
to check the news, the way parents

identify the bodies in your favorite show.

for who could have known that history  
would bend over us like a swan

with a broken beak? or you'll run across  
a friend you think you remember

the motions of—swerve—

look: a paper bag in the shape of a panicked mouse,  
a real-life figure of speech. there'll be all these moments

that, if you listen closely my future  
butterfly, your father's fox, you can see without me

having to lift you

(surely we'll have some chance  
together to look over things). you'll grow old

which is a condition in which your body slows  
and the evenings quicken, except it will be different  
for the you that you will make

for yourself. you will live so many days  
by a graduation

of light i cannot see—i swear  
i am doing my best to keep beside you, and you

will learn to swear,  
you will learn to work, to toil  
someday

for someone else's sake  
and the world will go on beyond you but first

beyond me. you are not born,  
are not able to walk, i've sneezed

and now you are trotting with your father, by now  
you are running, leaning with a light  
i cannot fathom—you're this fast—how can i be

melancholy? your father is not,  
you have him better than I ever did, even now,

a dolphin becomes water  
and you are light  
whether i am weak enough to keep  
this evening or strong enough to watch