

## how to watch your daughter grow

By Elidio La Torre Lagares

at first, it is dejection. denial.

you hallucinate a yellow “Baby on Board” sign  
on the back of a minivan you don’t even own –yet,  
so before your daughter turns into flesh,  
she grows on you like a possibility:  
beyond philosophical quests,  
the physics of the womb astound you

your wife doubles up on weight,  
and triples up in charms

*she also says you stink,  
and urges to get out of the house  
while she eats delicate pastries  
you bought for her after work*

but that belly of hers ripples,  
aerodynamic and expanding,  
with your daughter inside

*she wiggles and squirms, a form of unspoken  
language that is named in your blood*

until that day comes  
when you find yourself rushing to the hospital

*-my water broke, your wife said, and you thought  
about life as a fish-  
and you’re awestruck,  
jaw-dropped and thinking of beer*

every book your wife made you read on what to expect  
when she was expecting is rendered useless

and so, your daughter becomes a metaphor  
for all the poems you will never understand

*your wife looks at you in fear,*

*glance lost in yours, an emergent  
condition of gravity, and she longs  
for your words –the ones she said  
you were good at- but space is filled  
with awkward muteness by degrees  
as the girl supernovas into the world*

you think you just witnessed  
the birth of a star

*and she is induced into her first  
cry- she looks maddened- she fights  
the nurse and the warm blanket and  
the pink baby cap- she wants back,  
back where it was safer*

you word your daughter into life:  
welcome to the world, you mutter

her eyes shine like constellations  
in the expandable truths of the universe

as years go by, after the diapers,  
the colored dinosaurs, the mermaid  
fantasies, and the evenings together  
reading books about wizards  
and fairies, you become  
an expert dad –or so you think–,  
until one night she catches you  
watching the starlit sky and she wants  
to know what you're doing

*you don't want to tell her  
you're connecting dots of dead light  
to find a way out of the miserable collapse  
her mother and you are going through*

and so you tell her: I'm stargazing;

*you just think  
about constants and change*

she wants to know why does that even matter  
but the answer eludes you, a fading comet  
across the horizon, so she insists in knowing  
what are stars made of, and you choose not to tell her

it's only gas and stardust and stuff, and settle for an explanation  
as you know best: stars are made of light

myriads of sparkling galaxies  
populate your daughter's face

just like us, Daddy, she says

just like us, you repeat

you land a kiss on her forehead

*by the time she is fourteen, you memorize  
her Ariana Grande's songs and you  
karaoke at the wheel while driving her  
to art lessons –konichiwa, learn all about Manga  
and chibi characters- and you take her to the movies and  
endure "The Fault Under the Stars" with her, and after the  
popcorn and the sodas and the candy bars, you realize  
you just saved her from being lonely*

until that broken day when you find  
your daughter sitting on the front lawn

you would ask her what is she doing,  
but you already know the story

her eyes drill holes in the barren blindness  
of the sky- such sadness and rancor

her sobbing spreads in the crisp air  
as you drop your bags and embrace her

you both head back into the house  
where she'll feel safer, and you, less selfish