

Josephine, aged nineteen months

She tries to pull a pair of pink underwear over her head,
and stumbles, her eye covered by a cotton monkey.

Her snot-smearred face grins at me
as she totters down the hall.

Giggling, she pokes her belly button,
undisturbed by the chubby legs that carry her.

Humming, I hang a string of plastic pearls
around her neck. The long chain skitters along the floor
as she sways, running her sticky fingers along the beads,
and beaming at her reflection:

A fair lady, adorned with rareties - a beauty

"Just like my older sister"

She seems to say, gazing up at me.

If only she knew...

That I play constantly with the pendant hanging from my neck,
nervous.

That I hear laughter and hushed voices,
and immediately I wonder what they are saying about me.

That I carry a brush in my pocket
everywhere I go.

That I spend my lunchtimes
staring at smudgy mirrors.

That I dream of having tanned skin.

But now, as I study her merry eyes,
We will dance in our sunlight room,
the smell of avocado and clementines wafting from her hair,
our sautoirs clattering like seashells,
as we jump, whirl and cavort
to her favourite song;

In the Hall of the Mountain King

By Alexei