

Poem on Your Eighteenth Birthday – **Catherine Ann Cullen**

For Stella

You slipped easily out of your cocoon
eighteen years ago tonight,
came forth in the witching hour
babbling yourself into light.

The midwife took one look
and met my eyes,
saw starlight, aeons old, reach us,
clocked you as one already wise.

And I was blessed to call you child,
to call you daughter,
to baptise you with milk
if not with water,

to feel the long reach back
to your father's foremothers
fleeing across Spain to Sicily,
their mouth-sounds making them other;

and the hush of my Irish lenition,
my Normans with tongues curled:
centuries of lulling mothers
breasting the waves of the world

to bring us where we learned
to navigate beyond the day,
night-feeding by croonlight
lit by the Milky Way.

You weaned yourself away
under a harvest sky,
eyes on new horizons,
feet poised to fly.

Through eighteen springs you've flown:
wing wise, my star,
and honour those whose love
brought us this far.