

I Like You Best

Elizabeth Laing Thompson

After dark, I like you best:

Day fades to gray,
Moonlit fingers paint stripes across your bed, your face.
I tiptoe in and rest a palm across your back
to feel you breathe—
up and down, the rise and fall;
I lean in close to breathe the sweet clean milk of you,
to feel the warmth of life
flowing in and out, in and out as you dream.
You sigh.
And I smile—serene, content—
This is my sunset.

When you're asleep, I like you best.

At day's first light, I like you best:

Dawn brings a gentle scratching,
the swish-swish of chubby elbows and knees and button nose
scrabbling against the sheets.
Then one little grunt, and soon another;
soft coos and squeals crescendo to a chorus
of joyful babbles to salute the day—
my alarm clock.
I shuffle in,
eyes bleary, all-over weary, heart warming—
and peek around the doorframe.
Two bright chipmunk eyes, two black buttons
peer up at me between the slats.
Eyes twinkle, cheeks crinkle, nose wrinkles;
rosebud lips send fireworks sparkling across the morning—
This is my sunrise.

When you're awake, I like you best.

From my good-morning sunrise to my lullaby sunset
and my every hour in between;
from your first cry to my last breath,
until the echo of us fades, our souls' footprints blow away—

that's when I like you best.

I'm Still Here

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Michelin-Man legs kicking and flailing,
with a mighty grunt
you heave your roly-poly belly over,
then crane your weeble-wobble head around
to see where I went, though I have not moved—
I smile.
“I’m still here.”

Breakfast time, your pancakes wait;
you clamber up to gobble, squealing, “Cake-cakes!”
I sip my coffee on the couch behind you;
you cast glances over your shoulder to find me—
twinkle-eyed, you flash that syrupy heart-stopping grin.
I laugh.
“I’m still here.”

First day.
Your thin fingers squeeze mine in a death grip,
but soon you scamper off, hand-in-hand with a new friend;
every so often you pause to take sly peeks
at the pack of chatting Mommies—
I wave.
“I’m still here.”

“Here is fine, Mom.”
I brake, a dozen yards from the swarm of
bookbag-burdened pre-people.
I turn to hug you, but the door is already shut,
your back melting into the mob, disappearing.
I sigh.
“I’m still here.”

A shrill ring jangles me from a noontime armchair nap.
Little shouts and babbles tumble in the background
as we laugh across the miles.
A squeaky lisp interrupts, the line crackles; you chuckle.
“Are you there, Mom?”
I nod.
“I’m still here.”

A rattling disturbs my dreamy haze—
my own ragged breath.
A soft hand brushes cool against my forehead,
a lilting voice, warm as honeyed memories, sings lullabies—old friends.
“Don’t stop,” I say, even as I drift.
I smile.
You whisper, “I’m still here.”