

“Numbers”

I watched them chase each other
across the page,
the 1 grimacing into a 2,
and then a 3;
the 6 bouncing a ball up
to the 7,
the 7 bouncing it back.
The 8 skated elegantly,
entirely self-absorbed.

When the 1 married the 0
and became a 10,
I thought I'd had a glimpse
of heaven,
though I suppose the 9 was jealous.

I wanted to leave the numbers alone,
and let them have their stories.
But we learned to add,
and take away, and Sister said
that 2 plus 2
was always 4.

I knew this could not be,
but I liked her,
and pretended for her sake.

Dividing was hard,
and it always seemed we lost something:
a fraction would trail away
forever, vaguely accusing,
like and unbaptized baby
on its way to Limbo.

Multiplying
was the worst of all,
as glorious and impossible
as angels dancing in the playground.

I couldn't hold the numbers
in my head anymore; they'd become too big
and strange, standing off
to the side where
I couldn't see them,
even as they reached into my life.

Faith is a sad business.