

WINGSPAN

poem by Christopher Shipman



We decided it was time.
After three years in North Carolina
we booked an Airbnb
dubbed “The Bird’s Nest”
in a little mountain town outside Asheville.
We’d gone to the Biltmore.
A brewery with a Putt-Putt course.
Strolled downtown shops.
Had dinner at a local pizza haunt.
Then on the last night, our daughter, sprawled
in the Bird’s Nest’s
only bed, plate of leftover pizza
balanced on her lap, asked the number of days
she’s been alive. Like a good
21st century father, I used Google
to calculate the days
from birth to Bird’s Nest.
And there nested in the newsfeed, where, let’s
face it, tragedy lives
beyond itself, I read a headline
that celebrated a father’s use of Google
to save his child’s life
when a heart attack nearly killed him.
When his *heart broke*
the article says, before it spills into confessing
the subsequent promise of love
whispered nightly
that provided the child the chance to tell
his parents who he really is—
a gay West African teen
marching unseen to the pulpit decades of days.
Driving home to Greensboro
mist is a religion spanning
the mountains—an obfuscation of angels
holding hands wing to wing.
There’s a heart inside it.
A kind of breaking. A kind of aching
to be seen. Like the moment
a child asks how long
they’ve been alive. Our daughter
has been alive 2818 days—one more
than this time yesterday.

Image: “Ballet Above the Bay” by René Bohnen. “Wingspan” was written by Christopher Shipman for *Rattle’s* Ekphrastic Challenge, October 2022, and selected as the Editor’s Choice.