Poem for My Wife and Three Daughters

by Shann Ray

Last night Ariana our second daughter, only 8,
wanted to baptize you for your birthday.

Her hair shimmered
and the face of her joy reminded me of Two Oceans Plateau

in the Beartooth Range in southern Montana.
As she walked from the sink she carried

a large silver bowl, her small delicate hands
balanced on the sides, the vessel

filled with water that tilted
as she moved.

She placed the bowl in front of you,
dipped her fingers in and met your forehead
with the sign of the cross.

I saw your body exhale,
as if your bones and breath had been released

from a great and unforeseen responsibility.
Daughter, you said. A kiss.
With her eyes like fires, she kisssed you

and we all traveled under water together
as she touched us each in turn and we abandoned ourselves,
you and me, and our three daughters who are so young

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and more aware than we know.
We lived
below the weight of the world until finally

we surfaced and gulped air and found
we were hungry like wolves,
and broken like something lost

in the mountains, alone,
forlorn.

When I opened my eyes
our daughter still held your face in her hands

smiling
as she kissed you and kissed you.