

Neonatology

Is
funky, is
leaky, is
a soggy, bloody crotch, is
sharp jets of breast milk shot straight across the room,
is gaudy, mustard-colored poop, is
postpartum tears that soak the baby's lovely head.

Then everything dries and disappears
Then everything dries and disappears

Neonatology

is day into night into day,
light into dark into light, semi-
and full-fledged, hyperconscious,
is funky, is funny: the baby farts,
we laugh. The baby burps, we smile, say "Yes."
The baby poops, his whole body stiffens,
then steam heat floods the pipes.
He slashes his nose with nails we cannot bear to trim,
takes a nap, and the wounds disappear.
The spirit lives in your squirts and coos.
Your noises and fluids are what you do.

Neonatology

is what we cannot see: you speak to the birds,
the birds speak back, is solemn,
singing, funky, frightening,
buckets of tears on the baby's lovely head, is
spongy.

"One day you'll forget the baby," Mother says,
"as if he were a pocketbook, a bag of groceries,
something you leave on a kitchen countertop.
I left you once, put on my coat and hat,
remembered my pocketbook, the top and bottom locks,
got all the way to the elevator before I realized.

It only happens once."

We lay on the bed and we rode the gray waves,
apricot juice in a glass in your hand,
single color in this gray light like November.
It is April. We rock.

Then the miracle which is always a miracle happens in many stages,

then the mouth which opens,
the bluebell
that sings.

I was just pregnant,
am no longer pregnant,
see myself in my memory
in overalls, sensible shoes.

Shockingly vital, mammoth giblet,
the second living thing to break free
of my body in fifteen minutes.

The midwife presents it on a platter.
We do not eat, have no Tupperware
to take it home and sanctify a tree.

Instead, we marvel at my cast-off meat,
the almost-pulsing slab, bloody mesa,
what lived moments ago, and now has died.

Now I must take the baby to my breast.
There is no mother here but me.
The midwife discards the placenta.

What do you make of this rain, little one,
night rain that your parents have loved all their lives?

From 2 to 3 *The Streets of San Francisco* comes on each night,
and I watch Karl Malden stop crime, and listen

to the mouse-squeak of your suckling, behold your avid jaws,
your black eyes: otter, ocelot,

my whelp, my cub, my seapup.
In the days before you smile at me

or call me Mama or love me,
love is all tit, all wheat-smelling milk, humid crook of the arm

where your warm damp head seems to live.
I pretend your clasping my finger means you love me.

Dreamt the baby was born again,
arrived this time in a Moses basket,
had a crone's face,
a Senegalese head wrap,
a pendulous lower lip.

Mamma Zememesh, I dreamt your sister's names.
They floated around me as objects, satellites:

Zayd

Ntutu

Yeshareg

Asefash

Moulounesh

a spinning, turning, turning, spin.

I think the baby needs to eat. The baby's hungry.
Look! He's making sucking noises. Look!
His fist is in his mouth.
Why does the baby sleep all day? How
does the baby sleep at night? Three feedings? Hunh.
You need to let that baby cry.
You need to pick that baby up.
You need to put that baby down.
Kiss the baby too much, he'll get heartburn.
What are those bumps on the baby's face?
Why is the baby crying so?
That baby needs to eat, and now.

I dream the OB-GYN is here
to spend the night with us. He wears
his white coat and his stethoscope
to bed, looks like a loaf
of whole wheat bread. Good-night, we say,
and shut our eyes.

The next day

he's up early, jolly. "Time
to have this baby! Tallyho!" And so we do.

All of my aunties chatting like crows on a line,
all of my aunties on electric breast pumps,
the double kind, one for each exhausted tit.

Mommy, the baby's head popped off! A tiny head,
white, wet, bloodless, heartbeat still on the soft spot.
She tells me, Stick it back on, Girl. Don't be afraid.

You can't show your children you're afraid.

A paraffin seam bubbles on his scalp.
A pink cicatrix lines his lovely neck.

Giving birth is like jazz, something from silence,
then all of it. Long, elegant boats,
blood-boiling sunshine, human cargo,
a handmade kite—

Postpartum.

No longer a celebrity, pregnant lady, expectant.
It has happened; you are here,
each dram you drain a step away
from flushed and floating, lush and curled.
Now you are the pink one, the movie star.
It has happened. You are here,

and you sing, mewl, holler, peep,
swallow the light and bubble it back,
shine, contain multitudes, gleam. You

are the new one, the movie star,
and birth is like jazz,
from silence and blood, silence
then everything,

jazz.