

Six Pregnancies

I.

Pen hovers.

Three options, check one:

Hospital will dispose of remains according to protocol for medical waste.

Funeral home will collect remains for burial.

Patient will postpone decision for up to fourteen days. If no other option is chosen, hospital will dispose of remains according to protocol for medical waste.

(How is that three options? Isn't it just two, really?)

Hand drops.

One call to a funeral home.

Er, um,

how much to bury an embryo

and a Fallopian tube?

Awkward.

Strong enough to rend a body, imperil a life,

small enough to be a baby,

big enough to hold a lifetime of dreams on its shoulders

—did it even have shoulders?—

too young to merit a coffin, a funeral, hundreds of dollars,

the fuss and sympathy reserved for a lost loved one,

too old to be unremembered, unmourned.

Scratch an X.

Option three it is.

II.

Daffodils erupt

in sunny hallelujahs

and an infant squawks.

III.

Desire begat Possibility,

Possibility begat Wish,
Wish begat Anticipation,
Anticipation begat Optimism,
Optimism begat Expectancy,
Expectancy begat Hope,
and Hope begat Plans.

Plans begat Apprehension,
Apprehension begat Unease,
Unease begat Agitation,
Agitation begat Rumination,
Rumination begat Foreboding,
Foreboding begat Consternation,
and Consternation begat Dismay.

Dismay begat Bleakness,
Bleakness begat Futility,
Futility begat Desolation,
Desolation begat Woe,
Woe begat Despondency,
Despondency begat Resignation,
and the woman begat nothing.

IV.

From ashes must rise new life

This one will live
This one will live
This one will
This one
This
o—

V.

As a parent's hand shields a newborn's head,
detachment guards me, cynicism defends me.
Keep your scans, your tests, your explanations of benefits.
I do not want to view an unformed sac with no heartbeat
or to hear faux optimism that perhaps my dates were wrong
or to sit alone in the car and cry because I am not stupid.

The pain this time is physical.

Sensing what is to come,
not knowing what to expect,
I query Dr. Internet urgently.

“Cramping,” says the Internet...as pains wash toward me, draw my entire focus, then ebb away.

Instinct rises up;

I pace, then groan.

I scour my memory for breathing exercises learned long ago,
never put to use during surgical delivery.

“Cramps”?

No, *contractions*. The cervix is dilating
—my first time in labor.

“Blood and tissue,” says the Internet...as a perfectly intact sphere
carefully enveloping a tiny body
passes from its place of safety.

(How often does the Internet *understate* something?)

VI.

Like droplets from parched earth, brief, bubbling joy
—and laughter: As was Sarai, so am I.
To carry home a healthy girl or boy
would bifocals and calendars belie.

A fledgling fluffs and stretches out its wings
—this longing, hatched and quite prepared to leap.
I tie it to the branch before it flings
itself to plummet in a feathery heap.

Long minutes, stitched by hand into each hour,
and hours, slowly cobbled into day,
expose my odious tendency to cower,
my trepidation when I try to pray.

A wail, embrace, and sweet new name lay bare
both fear and joy...and prod me, now, to care.