

The Week Before

Tonight we shimmy galactic
under strung constellations
beside fertile citrus
the desert a kind of starship
flinging us far from all we know
our tiniest torments
all we've left behind:

the boy, three years old,
wonderful and all-of-it,
the one we longed for
over two long years of clockwork trying

and then, when the crush
of parenthood smothered all,
we forever longed
to escape him
for just a
breath,
a minute,
a small visit to the old life
we were so determined to leave.

This desert night we shimmy, sway, swing,
and I pretend
the globe of my belly
full of a surprise second baby
is meant for
dance after dance
songcall summoning me to my feet
again, again, one more
even as my lungs are broke with bursting

six months is still babymooning time,
six months is still second trimester,
all energy and fine,
so much time still left
you have to
shake it while you can.

My man and I,
the new life before us
a new world between us
slung dizzy with orbiting only each other

for this one night when we are
fearless and wild
manic and mischievous
summoning the teenagers we once were
those kids who never met
until out here, all night,
broke with bursting,
like there is nothing to lose.

Hoofbeat Heartbeat

These four days are crowded and lonely
 nurses frequent kind tourists to a new world
 I am citizenized into, restrained by

thick tape pinchpulled over IV needle
 oxygen monitor jawsnap on my big toe
 legcuffs inflating to remind blood to flow
 blood pressure cuff sighbiting
 on its own accord first every fifteen,
 then thirty,
 then sixty minutes

All feeding the story of me, of us
 to monitors that remind me regularly
 of how my body is failing us both —
 my swimming boy and me

Belly circumscribed by the fetal monitor
 forever slipping from the spot where
 it can listen in on the loping gait
 of my tiny boy's frantic heart

I learn to adjust it myself before the
 nurses rush in to find the song of him again
 I learn to heave
 my beached broodmare body alone

when his heartbeat slows
 because if I don't they will do it for me
 fevered and fast,
turnover turnover turnover othersideothersideotherside!!

I want to listen
 because I need to know he is here

and so the soundtrack of these four sudden days
 is the *bab-bum, bab-bum, bab-bum*
 of his fast foal heart,

and I close my eyes and listen to him
 hooves pounding some beach
 we will someday run

bab-bum, bab-bum, bab-bum

a promise, a presence, an *I'm here*, and *I'm fine*
sure and steady most of the time

those hoofbeat heartbeats
that doubletime mine

the only thing that offers
any kind of comfort
in the empty open night.

First visit

My feet braced on silver flips
 my legs covered by hospital issue cloth
 my sore everywhere body
 still leadened by that
 miracle metal magnesium
 because, they say,
 for two days after birth the risks increase

We twist through the halls
 and we buzz for entry
 into a hushed place
 where I first stop
 and stoop at a sink
 peel back a sterile soap sponge
 little plastic scrubbers
 made to make me clean

two minutes I brace
 new-seamed, scar-tugging
 hunched against the pull and pain of it
 watching a clock tick down
 the seconds until I'm done.

Clean, seated again,
 they push me in to the open-air pod
 four babies four-cornered in the space,
 he is in the back corner
 beside a big window
 that offers a view
 that should not soothe:
 a building,
 all twisting pipes and mammoth machine
 spitting steam into the dark night
 as here, all around me,
 space-age monitors attend to
 the story of too-tiny babies
 in numbers and sounds

and then

there

he is

closed in his new womb
bathing under violet lights
they say his skin needs to adjust
eyes covered with gauze sunglasses

all of him so tiny

my body clenches at the sight
so skinny, swathed in only
a diaper the size of a dollar bill,
too big for this tiny life

and oh, the lines:
through his nose,
into his arm
patch monitors sticking to thinnest skin
ET O2 toe glowing red,
a tangle of modern medicine
so different from soft simple swaddle

he sends a shatter through me
all over again,
and when I am told I can touch him
I am electric with fear

but I open the latch
to the portholes
of his small ship

I talk to him
and hope it's true about voice,
that they know it from always,
and I reach into the warm cocoon
scar-stretched across my
own aching skin
to touch
dark damp hair
wonder-soft over spongy skull
all of him still forming
my whole hand
cupping across
the small globe
of all he is

My other hand finds his wildly

precise feet, the biggest part of him
all one and a half inches,
toe tips tiny rosepearls
and I press, gentle and still

and so

here it is

our first embrace
my arms bracing against ovals
my head leaning against plastic
my heart trying to leave my body
to enter that small humid universe
where everything

suddenly

is.

how to become unraveled

cut your seroquels in half
those pills that quelled
sleeping beasts
but made you sleep
just too deep
when rising at 3 am
has become part of your day's
unceasing song
and you thought you'd
give your broken self
a little more pep
in the thinly threaded
night hours
when no one is up
but you
and the unquenchable thing
you strap yourself to
eight times each day
to make milk
to bring to the tiny baby
you only see
when you visit
the locked ward
for a clutch of hours each day
where he lays
every day
since he came
three months early
untangle the knots
and count the days
he's been there
—53—
count the days
until he comes home
—no one knows—
count the ways
your life no longer
knows you
untie all of it:
buy a new car
you do not want
refinance a home
you never should have financed
in the first place
find the big brother

a new school
renew a piece of paper
for a job
you don't know
if you can stand
to return to
stack the to-dos
til they tower before you
and your stomach
twists new knots
and your body
won't have sleep
it shakes you awake
to shake hands again
with that old
undoer anxiety
and you know
you know
you should probably
be under the care
of an expert in these things
before you go
halving your pills
but its all so tangled now
and you can't imagine
how you'd unfurl it all
to some expert
and it's been so long
since you were in
your own locked ward
that you've earned the
title of expert now
but a baby—
especially one that comes
three months too early
and just in time
all one pound, ten ounces—
can do things
to unravel
the knots of a ladder
you so methodically tied
you are the expert now
and you aren't sure
you'll listen
to someone who
cannot hold all the threads
anyway

and besides,
you tried
you made an appointment
they just didn't have one
for three months
three days after
his original due date
and So
you gather the threads
in those
fraying night hours
and braid them again
into something
that might hold
and hope to hold on
until then.