

The Birthings

Dot the goat was going into labor. When I pulled into the driveway I heard her moaning softly like a soldier or a rocking chair. I brought her water in a tin cup. I dragged the old mattress out of the little blue room with the clouds sponged onto the walls. I brought her a carrot, but she just looked at it and then at me with the same wilderness in her eyes. She was breathing in gasps, on her right side, with the left side of her belly round and rising and falling. I knelt in front of her and tried to lift her onto the mattress. She screamed once, stiffened, and I sat on the mattress instead, letting her remain on her side in the dirt and breathing rapidly and paddling the air with her cloven hooves. I stroked her head and her hips pulled together and then softened, together and softened. I rubbed the carrot against my shirt and ate it. I waited. The evening came first, and then the blood and then, as if she had suddenly realized what she was suffering for she gave a cry and I leaned forward, opened my hands like beaks to receive a yellow dress. She almost looked like herself again for the few minutes it took her to bite away the caul and lick the fabric dry. I folded it neatly and set it beside me on the mattress.

She cried again and I readied myself and she heaved a bowl of cherries at my feet. This she also freed with her teeth and cleaned with her careful tongue. She did not eat the cherries. The next four followed one another quick as yo-yos or fuses from Dot into the world. A BIC pen portrait, framed. A pearl-inlaid ukulele. A bible. A bag of marbles. Each one enclosed in a translucent sack—even the bag of marbles, which I thought a bit redundant—that she chewed, this time hastily, apart.

There was a sizeable pause. I arranged the items. I got the broom from the pantry with the many tiny dusty jars of peas and carrots, of pear sauce and applesauce and swept the mattress clean. I said, Dot you're doing great and before she could reply she spread her legs wide and produced a brand new mint green Kia Rio. I sighed. I wished it had been a Prius—we have a planet, after all, we must protect. She couldn't reach the top so I peeled back the sack myself while she brought forth a very modern art gallery. The sack was slippery. I got a little grossed out, but I didn't want to risk anything suffocating or rusting, or both.

She had a private school, next, with many Macintosh computers and plenty of windows. The Macs were last year's model, but still—everyone agrees that Mac is the future. I patted her flank. I crossed my fingers and hoped for a tropical island, but then I thought about plate tectonics and quickly switched my wish to a space station and a brief manual explaining who gets to live there and why, in layman's terms.

I was disappointed when, instead, out came a very old man. He sank his teeth into the sack and struggled for a few seconds, shaking his head from side to side until it tore. As he pulled off the slick membrane I found I couldn't help but notice that with his skin reaching from his sharp angular bones to the ground and his white hair sticking up in damp tufts and his nose protruding too far from his serious face he looked almost exactly like a chicken. What's your name, I asked when he had finished licking himself dry. I am the Great Godi, he said, or just Godi if it makes you uncomfortable to acknowledge things like that about a stranger. I said, Godi—that's an interesting name what does it mean. Mean, he asked, it doesn't and I'm not—it's just an inside joke. Inside where, I asked. Inside me, he said, and maybe, if my rotten luck died when I did, inside of even just one other person's brain. I said, mind, you mean, and he snapped, no I do not mind, not any of it. Not the bad reviews or the itchy head or the hollowness like a bride's train or like the tenderness of a city freshly molted after war that I'd leave trailing around in the audience when the show was done, and not the fact that everything I ever felt or said or even wrote was not remotely true, not at all, and that no one comes to visit even though all of them owe their lives to me. The Great Godi—I do not mind any of that and who are you, to tell me that I do. I wish I had another carrot, I said. I had not meant to say it out loud. I took his hand because it seemed as if he could use a little comfort. When he left I put on the yellow dress and ate some of the cherries, gingerly, so as not to stain. I hung the BIC pen portrait in the art gallery. It looked very lonely, even though the walls were all made of chrome, and the ceiling and the floor, too, and so, reflected, the illusion was that there were thousands of copies of it, identically framed and covering every surface.

Everything else was junk and I packaged it for sending off to feed the hungry, except for a small blue box that I found in the afterbirth while I was sweeping the dirt back into its usual place on the ground.

I opened it, and it was becoming morning shyly all around me like a seesaw trying to be a slide or like a towel tied whitely to a trembling stick, and inside the box there lay a tiny egg.

I followed my bloody footprints back to the pantry and put the broom away as the egg in the box in my cupped palm began softly to stir.