

My darling,
They told me you wouldn't come.

Long ago
On the frozen edge
Of a sterile medical slab
Jeans purse bra socks sweater sneakers
All off-brand, all haphazardly paired colors
A color riot of bad decisions
A mountain of sartorial condemnation
Under my swinging bare feet
Wearing that scratchy sneeze of fabric
They called a hospital gown
Barely twenty-seven and already
An unmother
On that otherwise unremarkable day
They told me
That unless you were a blessing
Who rode her way in
On the crest of a miracle
My darling
You would never come

*Even then, you tugged to be
I thought I heard you laugh
A billion crystal chandeliers tinkling in God's breath
In the ether of All That Is To Come
As the world slid away
From under my feet
And I clawed the air
For deeper meaning and
Some swiftly revised ultimate purpose
Something else to become and
To hold to
Women in our family endure, you see*

So
*I buried my grief and
When it burst free of its grave
In vibrant curling tendrils*

*Of smugly triumphant despair
I harvested the crop of sorrow
That brimmed over in my eyes and ran
Down my cheeks at night
And in all the sadness my life wrought my
Little warrior my
Ferocious cub my
Joy and my light
I swear I heard you when
You just laughed and laughed
And tugged to be*

Before I knew what magic was I knew to hide mine
From my keepers' beaten eyes
That could not see their own splendor
And so were powerless to understand mine
They saw the peril that danced toward me
As I walked toward my womanhood
When my greatest danger was circling
Closing in
They turned their eyes elsewhere
They put down their weapons
Before I had sense
And breasts
And a shield
They put down their weapons
And I was defenseless against
The twisted spirits that rewarded my
Still-trusting still-unbroken girl self
With poisoned talons of the foulest lust
And murdered the purest part of me
They never found the magic I hid deeper in myself
Than their hands
Greedy twisted and corrupt
Could dig
Thus I survived this first terrible crime
And through the years
Cauterized and sutured my wounds
In silence and alone
Tattooing flaming swords and roses
In the rage-filled creases of my scars
Pain to beauty

Through my marvellous secret alchemy
This was my magic
I hid it, and it was smart

(If anyone asks
My darling
This is how I endured what we call "childhood"
"Pre-pubescent hell" is off-putting
However depressingly apt
Women in our family endure, you see)

But I almost didn't make it
So when they told me you weren't coming
I wrapped the knowledge of the pain
You would never have to know
And all the things
You would never have to find a way to survive
Around myself
The coldest of comforts but yes
Even in this
Something to be glad for

And so what do you do
My stubborn tender invincible darling
Like lottery wins and dream jobs
Like perfect skin and all-expenses-paid vacations
Like everything I had ever had the audacity to want
They told me you were impossible
They told me to forget it
They told me you weren't coming
And so what do you do
You arrived
Fresh off the crest of a miracle
And now here you are

The place is a mess
I didn't even have time sweep up
I scrambled to find you a bed
The kindness of friends brought you
Little clothes little diapers
Your life already minimally accessorized
When you arrived
Tiny amazing darling

I didn't have time to sweep up
I didn't have time to build your steel fortress
No fiercely guarded castle tower
No sulfuric acid moats
To keep evil
Ever grasping, ever hungering
Away from us
I pledged myself to you
To keep you safe
When you arrived
You became my only country
I became your army
No castles and no fortresses
Just Mommy
Knives grenades guns in all my pockets
Nukes in my bra
Hellfire in my purse
All of it your arsenal and
In your name
I've seen this world
This world has seen you
I stand between you both
You laughed and tugged to be
So I will never put down my weapons
City blocks to embers
And bodies to cinders
In your name
Your only army
Your only patriot
All you need