

*Antidotes*

Breathing Room

*Holiday Inn, Corpus Christi*

One of those Spring Breaks  
too chilly for the ocean,  
I meet her in the hot tub,  
her swimsuit ruffled in blue-gray.  
*I'm Sophie!*  
*I'm five!*

Her babysitter—doing her nails nearby.  
We play with bubbles in the water,  
I learn more about Mommy's boyfriend  
than I ought to know,  
retire to my deck chair  
with Conroy's *Prince of Tides*.

“Somebody, HELP!”  
Babysitter shrieks, stricken,  
dangles Sophie by one foot,  
blue as her suit, limp as a bag of laundry.  
Red letters neon my mind.  
**\*CALL FOR HELP\***  
I yell “*Call 911*” slide in to her side.

**\*POSITION\***  
“*Lay her down, I've got her*”

**\*CHECK FOR PULSE\***  
I don't have to check for a pulse, her  
heart thunders under my hand.

I tilt her head  
**\*AIRWAY\***  
pinch her nose. Cover and  
blow—nothing.

Her jaw is clenched,  
I try the jaw-thrust,  
no joy.

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I wedge my knuckle  
behind her teeth,  
twist, her mouth pops open.

**\*BREATHING\***

Pinch, cover, blow.  
Two rescue breaths —  
cough, splutter, the welcome spill of  
warm water.  
Her eyes fluttering, glorious,  
before a mighty wail.

Her mom appears beside me, reaching—  
I unfold Sophie into guilty arms.  
Wander, smiling, back to my book,  
craving a bourbon and branch.  
Later, the first responder  
chides “*You could have lost a finger doing that!*”

I don't care.  
I put the sun back in Sophie's sky.

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The Art of Goodbyes

*Life, after all, does not take death for an answer. ~ Donald Culross Peattie*

Plenty of practice—this art of goodbyes.  
Two babies, two breasts,  
a starter marriage to a wounded boy.  
Both parents, all the aunts and uncles,  
a sister so close.

I know to sit behind the baby at the service.  
Babies are circles.  
And the officiant, I know the exact tone of voice  
when eulogy turns to commercial.  
I know to cry as much as I must.

Afterwards, I know to look for the hawk  
circling the cowboy's grave, the hummer  
at my shoulder, and later— shooting stars.  
I know how much chardonnay to have on hand,  
how many candles to light, to put the Bach on long and slow.

I know how to write build sing and story my way through,  
how to fasten my despair to the earth.  
I hold that grief is another way of loving.  
I know to follow those spiral steps,  
that heartache is a hologram.

That the second year  
can bring you to your knees, and  
decades later ambush with a sneak attack—  
the heart has a long attention span.  
The great gears spin on.

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Even though

*for my daughter*

my ashes are spread  
on the cliff by Sister's bench,

mingling with her, and  
your childhood pup,  
perhaps a few choice bits of me  
hauled off by harvester ants,  
down their grassy highway,  
secured in a pebble cave.

Even though  
I am gone,  
you will know me near—  
when a wren lands on your knee.  
When you start waking early  
to watch the world make a morning.  
When the asparagus

thrust their tender heads  
into April's warmth.

Even though  
I am not here,  
to hold you,  
to brush your hair,  
give it a trim,  
auburn curls on the front steps,

I am murmuring—  
get your whole story out.  
Don't let anyone shush you.  
I am reminding,  
perfection is overrated,  
a nap is a balm.

Hear my voice.  
Take a walk.  
Put flowers in a jar.

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Sit in the river,  
let it run through you.

Eat cookies, watch the moon rise.

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Visitation

My belly boiling with blood,  
I lie in the ER.  
A nurse with *Maria* sewn in blue script  
on her white coat,  
takes one look at me—drops her charts.

She thinks my tears are fear—  
the long shine of needle  
in the doctor's hand;  
she doesn't know what I know,  
I will never have a child.

She twines her arm in mine  
leaning close to hide  
the man in the baby-blue hat  
between my knees  
with his sword.

Eyes of caramel never leave mine:  
*I'm taking you on a picnic.*  
Like a song, she narrates a  
trip to the beach, the feel of the sand,  
lap of the waves,  
sandwiches of ham and cheese.

My ears fill with tears.  
I don't remember the feel of the needle,  
I remember the taste of ham and cheese.