

RINGER

Each morning trumpeted into being with a chorus of baby squawks. Daffodils pushed through the barely revealed spring mud. Crusted snow clung to the curbs. In his crib, my infant son sucked his fist until he gagged. The polka dot mesh crib bumper that we painstakingly selected surrounded him. In the afternoons, I pushed the stroller around the block and around the block again, taking note of the finely painted Victorian homes, each so full of wood, waiting to be undone by one errant spark from a frayed electric wire. I pushed the stroller around the block again. I put the baby in a snowsuit that made him look like a bear. The neighborhood nodded its approval. We left winter behind. My infant son smiled in my arms. Spring opened up to us, the days stretching like the baby himself in his crib after his morning nap. I was not on the couch crying. Who knew how the afternoon would unfold? I put the baby down for a nap. I cradled the baby in a creaky wooden rocker. I held the baby in my arms. He smiled. He bounced his open mouth against my shoulder. We lay on the living room floor, he on his play mat, me on the rug, listening to Joni Mitchell: *O star light, star bright, you've got the lovin' that I like all right / Turn this crazy bird around.* I walked the baby around the block in the stroller. The clouds nodded their approval, let fly a short frenzy of final snowflakes that glistened in the afternoon sun. The baby quaked his clenched fists. I put the baby in a vibrating chair that rocked back and forth and played electronic lullabies. Why is the bumblebee yellow and black? Why does the snow recede from the back porch like waves of sadness? The tulips poked up through the dead earth not unlike the tulips stitched into the decorative quilt that hung above the hospital bed where I gave birth. There, two medical students held my legs and joked about going to the gym. The epidural coursed strong medicine into my spine. The anesthesiologist flitted in and out of the room like a large hummingbird. Finally, I held the baby in my arms. He opened his eyes. His eyes were all the hung-over mornings I'd forgotten, every drunken sunrise I'd slept through. His eyes were four dozen Canadian geese lifting off a late summer river, all at once.

AMOEBAE

This is a poem about telling the truth.
Don't look for love here. You won't find it.
You'll find the night, crusted with galaxies,
hitching above the unturned chevrons of my house.
You'll find a mouse curled in a ball in the wall
next to an unchewed electrical wire.
The mouse is not playful. When I talk,
no one listens. I walk through the dark
of the house breathing out moist vowels.
Upstairs, my son pretends at sleep in his crib.
His baby teeth calcify into lumps in his jaw,
push against the insides of his gums.
His thumb, slippery with spit beside his mouth,
twitches only once. Meanwhile, snails
ravage the garden. The last of the pumpkin
blossoms fold in on themselves, unsexed
and heavy with powdery mildew.
In the artificial light of the dining room,
I cut pictures of the baby into circles
and stars, paste them onto the nautically themed
pages of his keepsake book. Each snip
of the scissors punctuates the unleavened night.

Say the night is loneliness. It's not.
It's the thoughtless night. Nor am I white-
hearted Atropos. In the basement,
the cistern crackles with spiderwebs and dust.
I do not place a handful pennies there
and return to find a pitcher full of ocean water.
Inside the water, only amoebae and unrehearsed light.

MORNING LASSO

Morning wandered into the middle of the road.
You're right. Stop reading. I was driving you to work.
Morning occluded sound and light. Morning
chokeholded the roadside. The wind sheered
all memory of roses. The wind sheered the metal
sheet laid atop a pothole. Morning dilated.
Morning faked an ocular migraine. Cancel story.
Morning wants to sex you up. Morning sneaks.
Cancel roses. Morning couldn't summarize the night.
Cancel circumcised light. Alright. Send sparrows.
It was all a mistake and I'm not a woman.
Expectant morning scrubbed daylight. Locked-down
and berserk, morning fussed and buckled.
Morning's pupils incinerated the road. We internalized
the stoic countryside. Morning came pronouncing
and freckled, heckling sooty snow banks. The foothills
gave up. Morning somersaulted, musky and forceful.
Line morning with collected geodes. Line it
with the finger paintings of privileged children.
Morning wasn't even one of us. Morning's split
lip leaked out a universe. Orbiting one of those stars,
at least for now, we exist. Morning wandered into
the middle of the road. You're right. Stop reading.

CORKER

Held between ice-sheathed car in the driveway
and sticky fingers of daycare dropoff,
between frozen car locks in the airport parking lot,
and kiss with tongue by the carousel at the mall,
this moment, this morning. I walk back from here.

How I reversed the “less than” sign on the chalk board,
and the math professor auditing my class corrected me.
How I kept conflating words after the concussion,
replacing *sugar* with *silence* and *ticket* with *tragic*,
as in, “Please pass me the silence,” and, “I misplaced my tragic.”

I went to the conference. I took a long flight.
I suffered a sinus infection. I took strong antibiotics
and slept alone in an airport hotel room under a thick comforter.
I tended to the chapped and reddened butt of a toddler,
my own son, after the diarrhea he got from
the medicine for an ear infection.

I stood in the middle of the airport thinking about
how one day it would be leveled down to its foundation,
a ruin of 21st Century America, how all the people in it
would die and mostly be forgotten, how I might be witnessing
the decline of America. See: the Make America Great Again hats
stacked in a red pyramid on the souvenir cart outside security;
the president at the press conference telling a reporter his question
is stupid, to sit down, be quiet; the poem a 4th grader submitted
to the community outreach program I run that read,
“I hope that Donald Trump can Make America Great Again /
I hope that Mexicans don’t steal are jobs.”

There is rent. There are bills. There are groceries to buy.
There is my husband. There is the dour Northeast—
all the snow, and nobody ever smiling. There is our son,
resplendent toddler learning the alphabet and numbers
and how to go on the potty, who tells me again and again,
“Daddy cleaned Asa’s poop off carpet.”

There is the pregnancy I lost last fall, the cavernous grief
that swallowed me, swallowed me.
Hold my hand. Would you like to go upstairs?
There are my son's hazel eyes, browning now near the pupils, like mine.
Look, here are the airline seats. Here is gravity.
We could be floating in the cabin with the pretzel packs
and cans of juice, but we're not.

One brazen bird calls outside the window.
I don't know what kind. It's February,
almost spring. It's been snowing for days,
until now, the sun glinting off a three foot drift,
melting its surface ever so slightly, and, beneath it,
evenly spaced in frozen dirt, the crocus bulbs I planted
in grief last October, waiting to crack open into beauty.