

Aviva

I

They start Wednesday.
Sometime in the night
like menstrual cramps,
deep in my vulva
my body beginning
its ancient rhythmical journey.

By Thursday morning,
I am on the phone,
massaging and kneading my groin
"No, not close together
Yes, I'll call you."

At six o'clock
half an hour
before the swimming pool closes,
I grab a cab.
"Is it a boy or a girl," he asks
and like everyone else
gives his prediction.

Back-crawling down my lane
other swimmers pass me,
the contractions invisible,
this internal beauty only known to me.
When the lifeguards blow the whistle,
I pull my swollen body
up the steps.

Walking in the warm twilight,
Gerrard Street busy with shoppers and
the whirl of streetcars.
At the park,
girls in red and white uniforms
chase a soccer ball.
Parents cheer them
from folding chairs on the grass
and the buses wait to bring them all home.

II

I will teach you
how to listen for the robin's evening song.
I will teach you to observe the quiet sparrows
sunbathing in the pavement dust.
I will show you how to approach cats,
slowly with your hand outstretched,
never come up quickly and surprise a dog.
How to greet the man in the store
who doesn't understand English,
and how to talk to the woman at the party
who sits on the couch by herself.

I will teach you what I know

and I will tell you over and over again
how you came to me.

III

After the pressure comes release
the hypnotist told us.
My partner's fingers gouge
my foot, distracting me
until the mucous plug blazes out
in a red streak
and lies like a grey worm on the bed.

All night the hypnotist's tape
plays over and over again.
We doze between the contractions
and then sharp pain pulls me out of the trance
"Don't leave me"
I tell her.

The midwife shows me
how to breathe
"Hoo, hoo"
I chant like a sick owl
all the way to the hospital
in the grey early morning rush-hour.
"Take Shuter Street," I tell her
"I have to push."
She watches me
through the rear view mirror
"Don't," she says.

And more chanting
propels me forward

until I am squatting on
the delivery table
a weight-lifter poised to pick up the bar
leg-strength concentrated
pushing down with all my might
deep belly grunts, groans
pushing past those violating fingers
from those many years ago
I am Amazon, I am Artemis
I am Joan of Arc

Until the crown of your head
sears my perineum
and everything stretches and tears
like continents are shifting and coming together again
and the oceans part and out you come
all arms and legs
and I feel your warm slippery body
against my belly.

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