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Notes To My Firstborn

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NOTES TO MY FIRSTBORN

for Janet

We were both tired and sore, papoose,
when they laid you on my belly,
womb-coated and mewling,
a cord still connecting us.
I stroked your wrinkled cheek,
put a naive breast to your mouth
as you nuzzled my softened walls.

I slept through the June dawn
dreaming you talked to me,
sat up in your cradle laughing
and told me about a cow.
I wakened at nine to news
that every breath was a battle,
each cry threatened to be your last.

I watched you fighting
through layers of glass, blurred by steam,
and wanted to take you back
through that tattered bloody exit,
to where I could touch you again
They put me back in bed and brought me flowers.

You lasted eighteen hours before your lungs gave out.
I took the daisies home in a cheap green vase,
fresh as their name for weeks,
while my swollen breasts
leaked the milk that should have fed you.
One finger remembered the clasp of your tiny hand.
God, it had perfect little nails.

Your eyelashes folded like butterfly wings.
You blinked deep blue.
It's a bargain to bury a baby—
forty-seven-fifty complete with numbered marker.
I lost the paper that tells me where you are.
I'm miles and years away,
but I still remember that cow.