

BEVERLEY DAURIO

Baby

we sat up late and talked about our mothers and grandmothers. i didn't talk about losing it. the plan was to get up early and go to the farmer's market. people go in families, they feed each other bits of sausage and smell the canteloupes. the sky is very big at the fairgrounds, and there are things to point at and explain. she talked about how she felt carrying her children, how they seemed part of her, extended, growing. i denied that, i said they had to be seven or eight years old before i could love them.

quickenings. that was before whatever it was that happened happened. the teratogenic impulse that came and made it blacken and stiffen. a process of dying and then being dead and rotting inside me.

baby.

i pace up and down the room with the scissors in my hand. this is after, after i know. i pace up and down and decide to cut my hair in the dark and decide not to. i decide to cut up the pillows and cut up the curtains, but i would have to clean up. i imagine slicing the thick green baize with the scissors, my hair in clumps on the floor.

i phone him and i don't make sense, my tongue is covered with white lace. i do not tell him it is dead. i do not tell him that what i have lost is looking at me from the inside, that the moment it died i knew and still at that moment it was fresh and its eyes were looking at me with longing. if i moved it moved with me. i had to keep moving so that i could imagine it was alive.

of course i believe that i killed it: a chance movement, one glass of wine too many, though i rarely drank, monosodium glutamate, coffee. of course i believe that he killed it, struggling without a lover's grace some night in a bedroom or a basement, one night when i fell.

people are kind and curious. they ask how i am. i say nothing. speech is a kind of mumbling, a bare gratitude, a near link to being which i do not deserve. i watch through a window, a man and his baby, the baby's face smiling, the

man's hand so near, i pound on my stomach and cry.

i cannot eat. food takes on its true aspect, its dead nature, and mocks me with the way it gives life. death of this gives continuing action, it states, and, like the voices of the reverends of my childhood, i ignore it, and cannot take it in. i sip at water, buy an apple that sits on the counter for a week, until it takes on a blackening, a stiffening of the skin that i recognize.

when it leaves my body it is not gone. endless bleeding, my blood, ironic with its intimations of life. she said it was beautiful, it was perfect. she assumes that this will quell my panic, but i prefer my blackened monster that never had a grip on life, something murdered by providence, not a joy i destroyed through negligence.

mary shelley's calm face of innocence succumbing to corruption—that is a morning image, a tiny frankenstein. my nightmares are of small sentimental animals—when i approach them they appear to have been cut apart smoothly with razor blades. there is no blood. i sit on the floor and frantically try to stitch the animal pieces back together. these things come to me when i sleep, when i dream at all. most nights are simply dark, the hollow where it used to be expanding to enclose me too, and i sleep as it does, as if dead.

rocking. for a day i can believe that someone stole it and it is alive. i can hate it then, not want it. my foolish empty arms, my starting at the sound of crying, my pacing back and forth: empty gestures of idiotic envy.

the endless maze is organized around a centre where it lies in wait. because i am trapped in process, neither near the way out nor capable of discovering its true appearance, i sit on the front porch playing the guitar and wait for him to drive up, my hands sore as if from sewing, the music like the sound of a canary descending into poisoned air. an endless supply of canaries, the radio blasting next door.

baby, baby.

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