

*Hymn*

The unusual births hit the town all at once. All the mothers, not recognizing their babies. Mine is so tall! said one, craning her neck. Mine so blond, said the dark next, squinting. Mine made of paper, announced a fleshy third. Mine built of glass? trembled another. One with a child who had no eyes, but ears so acute they could measure blinking. Another with a daughter who could, at will, turn into objects like brooms and light-bulbs. Soon, at the playground, the children could not recognize what made the other work, and they eyed one

another from behind the swings, from beneath the tire sculpture.

When they were older, they took over the village and ran it perfectly. Little did their mothers and fathers know. That when they'd eaten the foods and breathed the air and felt the feelings and made the love that created their children, they were, for once, in perfect synchronization. The son of glass was a doctor, and all could see inside his body while he worked on theirs. The daughter of paper was a scholar, and each book became a part of her wrist and arm and breast. The blond son lit the town for those months when electricity was no longer an option, and the daughter of great height cooled the moon with streams of her breath when it grew too hot from a passing meteor.

The changeable woman was always on hand to provide the most needed machine or tool. The child with divine ears listened to the soil, and pointed to where he heard the seeds unfurling with pleasure. Plant here, he told the one with the longest arms who could reach straight into the heart of the dirt. In later years, that eyeless one sat beneath the forest of trees he could not see but could take deep inside his lungs, and when the sadness was unbearable, it was only he who could soothe the villagers. Who could hear the type of tears by the pace of the blinking, and know in which manner to offer comfort.

Their parents were gone by then. The world had fallen into sense and sorrow.

Mother, they said. Father.

This is our decision, they said, bowing to each other.

Once a year they stood together, holding hands as best they could, with the new babies crawling on the floor at their feet: the babies of many heads, the ones made of words, the clay blobs. The triplets of air who would rush past and sweeten your breathing. Who's that strange one you made, Ma? Why, Pa. That creature is your own flesh and blood. Even though it has neither flesh nor blood; still, it is yours.

Then the grand feast, with food of all kinds, even for the several who did not eat food but survived only on the quality of listening. They usually hovered at the corners and when they grew wan and skinny, it was a reminder. To focus. On this day, they filled up visibly, fat and happy.

No one needed to say it, but the room overflowed with that sort of blessing. The combination of loss and abundance. The abundance that has no guilt. The loss that has no fix. The simple tiredness that is not weary. The hope not built on blindness.

I am the drying meadow; you the unspoken apology; he is the fluctuating distance between mother and son; she is the first

gesture that creates a quiet that is full enough to make the baby sleep.

My genes, my love, are rubber bands and rope; make yourself a structure you can live inside.

Amen.