

Emily Lacey – Five Poems



Feature

The Wait

Every pregnant woman walks
with their hands
on their stomachs
and I find myself
doing it too, feeling only
my lunch digesting
and the silk of my shirt.

At Market Basket, a woman is carrying
more than I am
and I have two containers
of slippery strawberries.
Her arms are full of what she knows
and I stand
in the giant line that only Labor Day
weekend could create.

A woman with a blonde bun is yelling
at the cashier,
telling her she has been here
for fifty hours,
fifty hours and she will bag
her own groceries
because she cannot handle
waiting
for one more second.

Never Should Have

When you pop up in dreams,
I know I didn't put you there—
you snaked your way in.
You think about me enough
to make it happen
and I don't think about you
at all.

You wanted my lips to do nothing
but press into yours,
me to only see you,
me to stay up until my eyes
were sunken in, pink with forgotten
sleep, just so we could be
alone.

It's been three years
and I wish you could see
how I was never yours
to begin with.
How you never should have
buried me in dark places
when I never hid you.

If you see me again
your eyes would take
in my bulging belly,
my finger hugged by a diamond,
and you'd just see labels and a plan
that didn't fit
with you.

But what you don't see
is how my husband would never
have me lay on the floor,
wait for me to make a nest
with old, blue blankets
that smell like another marriage.

In the winter, I'd huddle
by the space heater,
hope that our bodies would
make it bearable.

In the summer,
the fan wasn't enough
but this one room was the only room
that was safe to kiss in.

I hope your arms feel heavy
and uncoordinated
next time you reach into my dreams.
And when you attempt to drag me out,
try to pretend like my Subaru hasn't forgotten
what your driveway feels like under its tires
late at night.
Just try to ignore
that I sleep in a Queen-sized bed now
with someone who loves me
outside four walls.

Before Birth Test

There is nothing quick
about ten seconds
when I remember the whispered
Mississippis between each number
and the Q-tip climbs
inside my nose, its eyes searching.

No symptoms, but they need my baby
to be safe from me
just in case.
Even though prying her away
would wipe me out faster
than any plague.
Even though my hard living room floor
now seems more appealing
than waiting hands and beeping monitors.

Once the Q-tip leaves, they stop counting
but I am left with an unreachable feeling,
unearthing parts of me
I never knew I had.

So Brave

Rate your pain,
the medical badges and masks say,
like it's an Amazon review.
How many stars do you give
contractions—how much more
can your body take,
how long can you save
your ten, your highest number?

You look too young
to understand the difference
between pressure
and when it crosses that line.
When it is sharp and inescapable.

Your epidural isn't working
but they don't believe hot tears.
You can't sit up,
saw blades working on your skin,
in the area no one wants
to talk about.
You tell them about your chronic condition,
the reason this is worse for you.
You are ready to spell it for them,
but their fingers don't care
about searching.

They don't dare to think
a young woman is feeling something
that would have broken them sooner.
Instead they murmur
you are so brave
you are so brave
as they re-do your epidural
just to shut you up.

Drumming Fingers

A hand so small can still
squeeze tight enough
to leave a feeling imprint.
A grip that helps me out of bed
with my fluid-filled legs,

my back full of hospital bed aches.

When I feel the pulsing of stitches,
there's a new heartbeat in my palm—
those sticky, little, drumming fingers.

Even when across the room,
her hand searches
and mine knows.

Emily Lacey is an editor for a medical publisher and a freelance writer. She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Pine Manor College, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Evening Street Review*, *Medical Literary Messenger*, *The Broken Plate*, and elsewhere. Lacey resides in the suburbs of Boston with her husband, author Patrick Lacey and daughter, Nora.