

Motherhood

Prose — Laura Dame

The baby is crying before I even try to sleep. A severe case of colic—we've been at it for months. My arms and hands are in the shape of her, contortions and contusions of her weepy fists and knees. She smells soft and milky and oblivious. Everything else reeks of staleness and all the air in the house enters my lungs like pulp.

I pace the rooms with her. Streetlights shining in the windows guide my repetitions, slipping across her pinched up face over and over. My mouth tastes of damp trash, teeth gritty when I run my sludgy tongue across them. The house creaks like an old woman who wants to die.

The baby cries harder. 2:28 a.m. I sing little Jesus songs to her. I am wearing one sock. The floor is cold. Count the 63 wooden boards in the hallway 20 or 30 times. My nightgown slips past my breast every few rotations. I fix it half as many times as I ought.

She wails and wails and I change her and she wails. Try to nurse her. My left nipple bleeds.

Graham cracker crumbs collect in her fairy floss hair as I munch on them. A dry honey-cinnamon mush in my mouth. She hungers, but my body is failing us both. We sway in the rocking chair for an hour.

4 a.m. and I cry too for a while. I tire of the tears, she doesn't. Our slate-colored couch slouches likes it's melting away. I wish it would take me with it. The ice machine dumps another noisy load and punctuates the hollow that is this place. The dim light shows off the dirty windows, smudgy and smeared and so sad-looking they seem to sag.

Underneath a medley of rough, fuzzy blankets, we sleep: a whole 45 minutes. She cries.

Pterodactyl. The clock acts as a metronome for the baby's fuss. I let her scream her lungs away.

Turn the subtitles on for the news. Clouds moving in today.

We step outside. The sunrise might be more brilliant from within the shadows. It's cool and

damp on the porch. I glance down at her precious little body and it looks just like closed doors

and dusty furniture. I understand—she cries—the abandonment. When it breaches the treetops, I

look the sun in the eye.