

# With Julia in the Milk Bed

EMILY TUSZYNSKA

I.

Yes, the world made way, opening once more.

What choice does it have but to go on?

The two of us mark a place where time  
turned inside out, dropped  
through itself,  
your head tucked, looking back  
into the past.  
The old world  
you were born out of remains  
unredeemed,  
irreparable—

Yet here in the house cleaned for your coming,  
the old bed has been made with new sheets,  
the doors and windows  
have all been opened.

The pliant limbs of the willow oak give way  
as if to usher in this breeze that blows night and day from the east.

Summer is fully fledged. It trembles at its own excess.

All morning two falling notes,

then two falling notes:

Little chickadee, high  
in the sunlit willow oak at the east window,  
then deep in the cypress at the north.

Brief song handed back and forth.

One for sorrow, two for joy, isn't that how it goes?

Joy then, I'll take that,  
along with my ice packs,  
my cabbage leaves  
and compresses. And you  
that I can hardly call my—  
I'll try—unpacked bundle  
I scoop onto my slack stomach.

Your star hands flex and wander  
your blurred and sunlit heavens.

II.

Somewhere far below, the shriek and thump of your brothers  
washes in and out of the house like a tide. Below that  
the groan of distant traffic, and the soft, strange wind,  
and below that . . . an almost imperceptible grinding.  
The slow wheel of time consumes the present moment.  
and below that, below that . . .

You grope to latch and fail, again, again,  
startle yourself  
with a thin  
strained wail,  
gape-mouthed,  
my huge hand guiding your head  
in to try—*there*—press—  
you clamp wide  
we teeter  
on the brink—kick away a sheet of pain—  
and you—and we—are falling, drifting  
down into the wilderness below thought,  
into pure perception.

Shifting branches fill the windows and mirror,  
continually swept aside  
and then falling back into place.

World veiled, unveiled.

Beguiled, beguiling, and guileless.

The wind is the world's emissary,  
and we open our doors and windows to it.

Small body of our bodies,  
Small soul of our souls,  
we called you here,  
always to be separated  
from that which you desire.

III.

Everything seems impossibly distant  
and also unbearably close.  
I'm weeping again  
for the children's  
days-long dying. Ambulances  
waiting at the blockade.  
Perhaps this is how it is  
in the mind of God. Continually  
scraped raw.  
Today they write  
*still searching the Atlantic  
for bodies.*

*Likely never recovered* they write.

The 1, the 12, the 82, the 126  
let fall.

*A flash in the sky and a rapid vertical descent.*

Julia, your fire is laid in ashes.

One room among rooms  
beyond number,  
east window carried up at last into morning sun.  
The beveled edge of the mirror  
flicks its light into the swept corners.

Everything intermingles.

The pain at the breast  
indistinguishable from the sweet  
ache in the palms  
as the milk lets down,  
and the blood, the afterpangs.

I can't tell the difference between joy and despair  
and something deeper still.

IV.

Slowly, now, distinctly. In the foreground of hearing:

Two notes,

two notes.

Where is this spring's moss-flecked nest  
with its six speckled eggs? The boys and I  
searched but couldn't find it.

Perhaps the black snake already knows.

One thing,

and then one thing,

and then another.

The bedside petals edged in fuchsia,

and then their fragrance, come round again

and reaped for joy.

Blossoms, Julia. Vines, unfurling, grains of soil clinging to their tips.

Everywhere one turns, abundance.

Surely goodness, surely mercy . . .

