

Farah Marklevits

AULD LANG SYNE

I squint and try to break glass flutes
with my mind. That'll show them
for once that Baby New Year is a sham.
Just because it's a baby doesn't mean

it will be loved. I prefer the old man,
Father Time, who might talk, if we'd listen,
and have a sex life, if we'd let him.
But no one lets me touch him, instead

they feed me cocktails and champagne,
they make me pledge to start a hobby,
to litter less often but more effectively,
to continue my lessons in how not to love.

They make me kiss my husband, Mr. Me,
make me think new, new, but nothing
is new. I know new, and I don't like
how it leaps into my womb like tongued

fire, as if I weren't the same old scorched
land, the same old woman mothering time.

FIRST LESSON

Throw the baby out with the bathwater—
the one who did not want his heart
or hand, the one who was not wanted.
Throw the baby, throw the water out.

Start over. Throw the baby out and keep
the bathwater when babies are plentiful
and water is scarce, and we know what
we must conserve. Keep the baby and

the water if you or I can lift a baby gently,
dripping from the bath, without spilling
a single drop. What formula can bring us
a baby with my eyes and your thin mouth?

We stare at the grey bathwater. We call
our bodies, call for someone to tell us
what to throw away, what to keep. Calling,
we wear out, we deaden, and then we're shot

through with a sudden life. It takes years
to learn to keep calling, although no one tells us
when or how, and no one answers.

PARTIAL ELEGIES

I shuffle among the babies
stuffed into vegetables—
fat faces bulging from split
pods, fleshy little ones
balanced on tulip petals
or pinned to daisy centers—

In the markets, tomatoes piled
into half-bushel baskets, each
with one shallow dead eye where
the stem snapped. It's late summer,
harvest—Everyone asks, *How ripe?*

Women in white peer into, pull
blood out of me. *It's a bad season,*
the vegetable babies sigh.
The nurses whisper, *over-ripe,*
she's how close to rotten.

• • •

You were still in me, you were still
in me, you were
still but slipped
from baby
into personification,
that gulf of grief that separates
the human from all that is not.

• • •

In his dream, two phantoms
shimmered above our bed, one over
each of us, or were they both over
me. He didn't know what they were.

In mine, a tarantula walked a fence
lugging a plastic bag filled with
an unknown something heavy. I
couldn't see the errand, or how long.

Our room was pregnant
with images we could not read.

The phantoms tried
to warn us, *Don't believe
in medicine, don't drink
chamomile tea, don't drive
your car through
the desert.*

The spider said,
*Don't trust what you carry
in daylight. You need to learn
animal.*

Our trouble: you came to us
when all we wanted
was literal.

• • •

Love traveled between us
like a wire or wave, and we spent
all our time discussing which
we were more like.

Now, we
don't talk about the truth—
our bodies blur, one into the other,
and make new sorrows.

• • •

I was more miss than carry.

You were echoes mapped
in grayscale, but I could not
decipher them. You were
any smudge, any slight change
in contrast. I was ignorant and
could not tell what was me,
what you.

No heartbeat, the mapmaker
said, *I'm sorry*.

• • •

Strapped to a gurney,
swaddled in blankets,
the doctor showed me
how a womb looks after:
she would make me a pealess pod
with a few neat tricks of cloth,
a simple straight line—

• • •

The D is for dilation, the C for
something that sounds like cure
and carve. D is for how wide
is the body's dead-end, C is not
for keeps. D is for *Don't worry,*
you will never have what you want,
C is for clasp another nothing
into you. D for dumb, C for creature.

• • •

My body photographed before and after:
conscious and full of emptiness, then
unconscious and even more empty,
as mournful as the vegetable kingdom.
Empty of a what, beloved blob,
set of numbers, symptoms,
all our weightless talk.