

Sectioned

by Katrina Gray

The nurse left work at five o'clock. Before she left, she poked her head in my room and said, "Sugar, you gonna lose your milk if that baby won't suck."

My eyes opened, crusted with sleep.

"Or remember you could pump," she said. She patted the metal doorknob, her ring clinking against it. "'Night, Rhonda," she said. My name is Brenda. She waved to my husband Ted. He waved back.

My breasts are rocks tonight, hard and full with hot undrunk milk. The night shift doesn't know what she knows: they don't walk around with my story inside them. It's barely inside me. It trickles through the stitches in my stomach; it leaks from my nipples. My tongue is heavy and fat.

The nurse saw it all—the nurse and my husband. I want to ask one of them, but I'm still on a pain drip that has me tanked. The nurse is gone for the day. Ted may know what to say.

"Sorry, I farted," Ted says after the nurse leaves. He squeezes my hand like he's telling me grave news. "It slipped out." Then he tells me I did good work.

I think he's kidding; I didn't do anything. What I did—what I *remember*—is that I lay still, arms open at my sides, strapped down, crucified. I stared at a light. I smelled skin burning. I felt a tug; I felt bruised. They held her up, silent and blue, wet and motionless—their trophy. Everyone left, following her, leaving me.

He tells me that the NICU still has her under lights, that she's thriving. I think—briefly—*They can keep her, then, if she doesn't need me.* But I remember the nursery, all her things. She needs those things—blankets and diapers. Pastel frames for pictures—photos I imagined would be taken after the hard work of labor, after pushing her into the world, after *doing* something. Sweaty and heroic, I would mother her ferociously. *My daughter*, I'd call her. The moment would be fixed like fossil. Friends would want to hold her, and I would tell them how I powered through, that I

learned what I was made of.

I don't think the nurse cares. Right now, she laughs heartily, her black hair swirling in her gin. Her hand digs into a bowl of peanuts almost out of her reach. She stretches toward them, past a lonely man who is stirred by her perfume. There is not a trace of me on her anymore: no breast milk, no blood. She is washed and clean and ready for something new. Their eyes meet, and she goes home with him, humming the last tune the band played. She will come back in the morning after washing him off her too, and she'll greet me with feigned surprise: *You still here, honey?*

My story will come out in a scream one day. The pain will rise up, unable to stay hidden. I will heave it out in waves, in rounded bellows, moving it into the world.

Goddammit! I'll tell this little girl when she runs a grocery cart into my heels. *Can't you do anything right?*

My gown is wet and sticky with yellow milk. Ted's eyes grow wide, baffled. I reach for the buzzer.

The new girl bounces in with a machine that has two suction cups attached. Her scrubs have Disney characters on them. She asks me, her eyebrows raised in a question: "Time to express?"

