

A Night of Not Knowing

by Michelle Elvy

for Jana

They say you are OK, but how am I to know, really? You were taken — *taken* — so fast, I had no say, and I'm left with nothing but your sudden silence, not the hot cry I expected. We had been one — breathing, feeding, living in unison — and then you were gone, lifted from me swiftly, rushed to a safe sterile place. And now you lie there in your own world of plastic and tubing and disinfected air, and I lie here in my world of pain, helpless to help you. They say you are OK but I know what I saw: a purple lifeless thing, sticky and wet and tiny in the surgeon's hands, taken from me to keep alive. I want to take you back, but you're an impossible fifty meters down the hall, a world away. So I wait, with my belly split by expert incision, my breasts landmines waiting to explode at the slightest touch, my heart throbbing because it cannot feel yours any more. I lie here alone with my searing scar, raw with fear and not knowing. I lie here sleepless and wait for the moment when I will touch your new skin, smell your new smell, see your tiny fluttering chest, and feel your perfect fingers wrap round my thumb with their miraculous might. I already know the hard suck of your hunger, and my breasts weep with nourishment that you may or may not ever know.

