

Birth

Category: Poems

written by Albert Howard Carter III | April 24, 2015

Albert Howard Carter III

(for NCC and RAC)

My wife lies in the little room,
tight as a drum, and even more convex.
She breathes hard as the contractions come.
The doctor, some 20 feet away,
shares his lunch with me,
the husband and coach;
My wife, lunchless today,
hears this act of betrayal
and resents (I learn later)
that we are eating cake:
she's clearly in "transition,"
when even the nicest women
can become cranky.

Groans and wails fill the hall;
The place sounds like a zoo.

A nurse checks her dilation.
"Your kid has hair already,"
she says, pointing to strands
that first advance toward the light,
then retreat back to our first home.

Soon we're in the delivery room,
a sort of pajama party
awaiting the nude guest of honor.

Ever a student of life,
My wife wears her glasses
and peers in the mirror
mounted high.
Coaching at her shoulder,
I (my heart pounding) watch;
Our joined hands are sweaty.

We see her groin
fold outward in a vertical grin.
She grips my hand harder
than I thought possible
for the grand entrance:

The baby's head crowns forth.

“And we have...,”
the doctor cries,
easing the shoulders out,
“a baby girl!”

He holds her up by the heels,
high, a primal trophy,
and flicks the soles of her feet,
as if starting an engine...
our baby is gray, but
she coughs and gasps
 –turning pink–
and cries that small jagged cry
you never forget:

I'm here

I'm here

I'm here

About the poet:

Albert Howard Carter III is adjunct professor of social medicine at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, in Chapel Hill. His prose and poems have appeared in *New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, [Hiram Poetry Review](#), [Ars Medica](#), [Blood and Thunder](#) and elsewhere. His latest book is [Clowns and Jokers Can Heal Us: Comedy and Medicine](#). His website is [ahcarteriii.com](#).

About the poem:

“The poem was occasioned by the birth of my daughter many years ago. Hospitals in Florida were beginning to allow men into the birthing room as coaches, providing they took the training beforehand. I strongly encourage men to do this; it brings them closer to the mother and the child.”

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer