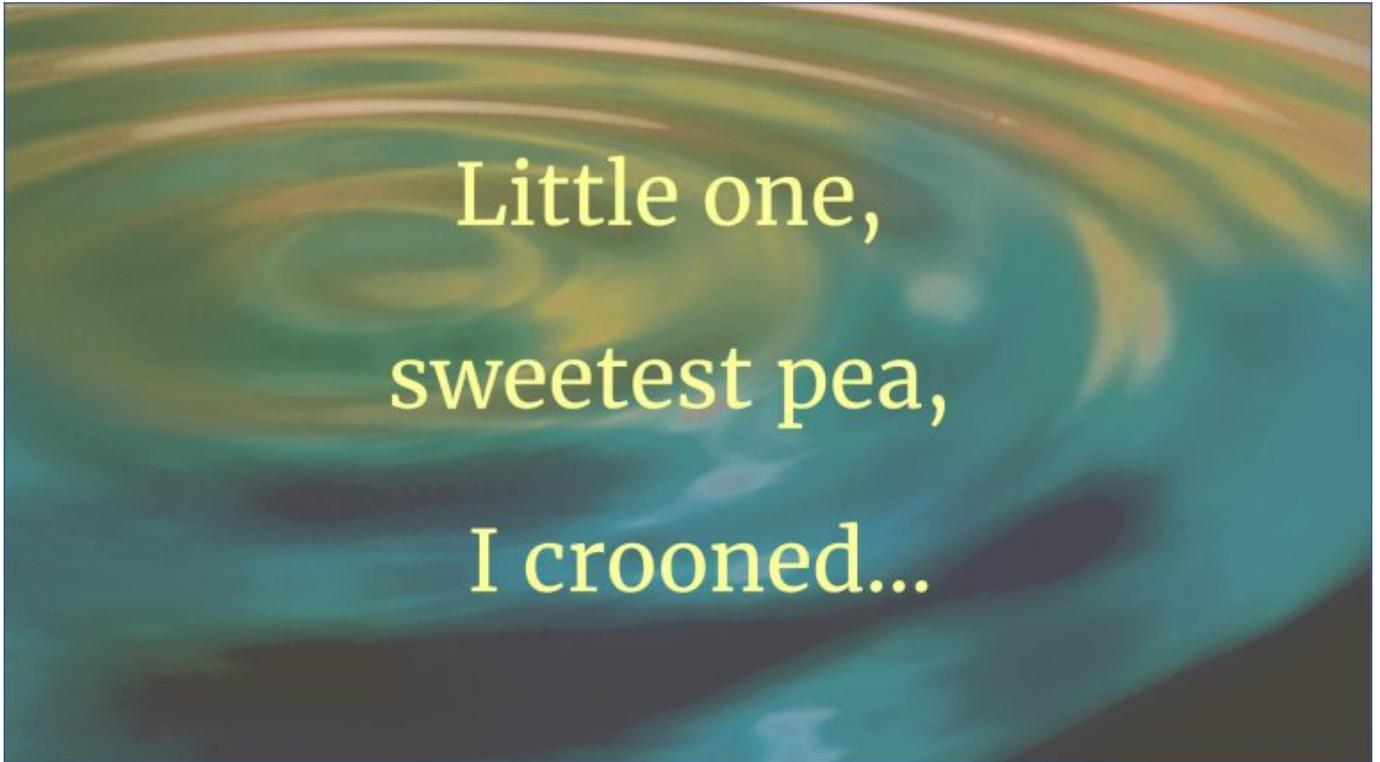


Toxemia of Pregnancy

Category: Poems

written by Joan Baranow | June 10, 2022



There was the bed bent in half,
the needle in the wrist,
the crack of bathroom light under the door.
Your father tried to sleep in the hospital cot
while the nurse came in every hour
to watch your heartbeat scratch itself
on ticker tape. Seven months inside me,
you must have liked the sugary IV
for never had you leapt so much
as if to say, OK, let me out.
I lay in a body whose cells had blown apart
and watched the clock move towards eight
when the surgeon would come lift you
feet first into air-conditioned light.
I tried to imagine how your world
would open onto this—
and even then I did not know
what “this” would be.

It was later, when you lay, breathing hard,
like an animal thrown by a car,

that I knew what I'd done to you,
though you were the "big boy"

among the mouse-sized children
who would also someday go home.

Each night after all day in the NICU
the imprint of alarm bells kept ringing

inside me and I'd see that deep pit
in your chest gasping fast. On the third day

when I first held you
you seemed a little surprised

and you slept in the fragrance of my skin.
Little one, sweetest pea, I crooned,

too new for mothering to sing
any of the songs I had rehearsed.

How we all love beginnings best,
and there you were, learning to breathe.