Chasing Her

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This collection of poetry and discussion are representations of my experiences with and reflections on pregnancy, motherhood, miscarriage, and marriage within a feminist construct. The poems are written predominantly in the confessional mode, and aim to raise awareness of these subjects, and also act as a catharsis for my own self-healing.

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INTRODUCTION & ANALYSIS

As a mother, the question I dread more than any other is “How many children do you have?” It is a seemingly easy question to answer, but I never really know how to proceed. I usually say, “One, my son Reid.” Yet, lately I have been trying to become more open about my miscarriage, prompting me to answer with “My son Reid, and my miscarried baby.” It always makes people uncomfortable, though, when I mention miscarriage.

My thesis will be a collection of poems discussing the issues of pregnancy, pregnancy loss, and the complications of motherhood. Women’s writing about pregnancy and pregnancy loss are just beginning to find space in the literary mainstream. Lauren Elkin writes in The Paris Review, “Instead of the ‘you can have it all’ approach of the previous generation, this kind of writing on motherhood registers with great sensitivity the phenomenological experience of motherhood in the early twenty-first century.” Moreover, Elkin reflects on how these texts not only relay information about pregnancy and motherhood, but that “these motherhood books ask the reader to think about the ways in which we are bodies in the world, subject not only to the biology of being born with a uterus but into a particular kind of body, in terms of race, ability, and desire—and the way all of that is imbricated in the social.”

According to Mayo Clinic, “About 10 to 20 percent of known pregnancies end in miscarriage” (Mayo Clinic, 2016). Even though up to one in every five women who become pregnant will have a miscarriage, the discourse surrounding pregnancy loss and its effect on the mother, including maternal guilt, grief, and post-partum depression, are relatively taboo in America, especially the Midwest.
In my experience, conversations on these subjects quickly turn quiet and secretive, and usually don’t evolve into an open discussion about motherhood, but instead are cut awkwardly short and pivoted abruptly into other topics. After my own miscarriage in the fall of 2018, I felt utterly alone. It wasn’t until I started telling others, particularly women, about my miscarriage that I learned just how true the “one in five” really is, but I struggled to find a way to express how truly and deeply broken I felt, even to these women.

My physician gave me a short pamphlet about miscarriage and how women’s bodies are affected after pregnancy loss: post-partum depression, possible lactation, extreme cramps and bleeding. In “Unhappy endings: A feminist reappraisal of the women’s heath movement from the vantage of pregnancy loss,” L.L. Layne describes how literature regarding pregnancy loss is either not available, or denormalized in common pregnancy texts. “In Our Bodies, Ourselves, ‘the bible for women’s health,’ negative reproductive outcomes are segregated to a chapter of their own instead of being integrated into the four chronologically ordered chapters on pregnancy and birth” (Layne 7). This seemingly subtle organization method separates pregnancy loss from normal pregnancy experiences, which is a further reason to create discourses in all forms surrounding pregnancy loss.

As published in Obstetrics & Gynecology’s “A National Survey on Public Perceptions of Miscarriage,” the feeling of guilt and shame are ever-present in national perceptions of pregnancy loss. According to the survey, “Of those who had a miscarriage, 37% felt they had lost a child, 47% felt guilty, 41% reported feeling that they had done something wrong, 41% felt alone, and 28% felt ashamed.” (Bardos, et al.
2015). Because of this, I believe sharing stories and experiences of planned and unplanned pregnancy loss through multiple mediums begins to remove the stigma and inserts these experiences back into the normative of pregnancy and motherhood. My poems about experiencing miscarriage, the maternal guilt after pregnancy loss, and the complications pregnancy loss causes to both a mother’s body and mind, all deeply confessional in nature, are part of a growing body of poetry dedicated to addressing these issues.

While creating these poems, I turned to other poets who have written about pregnancy loss and the effects it has on women’s bodies and mental states. Among these poets, the ones who inspired my work the most are Sylvia Plath and Sharon Olds. Plath is well known for her confessional style of poetry, intensely describing extreme moments of individual experience and sharing it through the poetic “I.” Like all confessional poetry, Plath’s work is deeply personal. Her poem “Parliament Hill Fields” describes the speaker’s miscarriage through winter landscapes and scenes of Parliament Hill Fields in Hampstead Heath, London. “The wind stops my breath like a bandage. / Southward, over Kentish Town, an ashen smudge / Swaddles roof and tree. / It could be a snowfield or a cloudbank. / I suppose it’s pointless to think of you at all. / Already your doll grip lets go” (Plath, “Parliament Hill Fields,” 1932). At the end of the poem, Plath gives the reader room to hope for a future with a little less pain. I am drawn to Plath’s intense first-person perspective in her poems and the bravery she exhibits in telling difficult inner truths. In my poems about motherhood, I try to confess exactly what I’m feeling to my readers, even the difficult realizations.
What effect does the lens of pregnancy and pregnancy loss have on discourses surrounding women’s bodies, experiences, and motherhood within confessional poetry? My poem “Must and Sandalwood,” discusses how, after you become a parent, you can lose part of yourself, often a part you really enjoyed. In this poem, the speaker is an exhausted mother who is looking back on a summer in college: “As I stepped up the library’s smooth marble steps, slick Mississippi sweat dripped from my nose, / streaming down my neck, pooling under my breasts, staining my tank tops. / The smell of library, must and sandalwood, mixed with my own scent and filled my lungs.” Normalizing the feelings of grief and loss of self after having a baby is one of the reoccurring themes in my poems.

Sharon Olds’ poetry has inspired me to write about domestic women’s issues from the point of view of the woman, primarily in regard to women’s bodies, sexuality, marriage, motherhood, and trauma. Her poem “The Unborn” uses imagery and metaphor to describe the pain a mother feels for her unborn children: “And sometimes, like tonight, by some black / Second sight I can feel just one of them / Standing on the edge of a cliff by the sea / In the dark, stretching its arms out / Desperately to me” (Olds).

This poem is so personal within the domestic realm of poetry of motherhood and uses poetic elements including imagery, enjambment, and figurative language to vividly portray a woman’s raw emotional experience. Within the same domestic arena, my poem “Tiger Stripes” creates a scene within the home to examine the feeling of individual triumph after carrying and delivering a baby. “Tiger Stripes” is a domestic poem about the power of a woman’s body and her sexuality in a celebratory style: “It’s the first time in days / I see my breasts / as breasts / and not / milk machines. / Putting the buds into my
ears / I crank the first song / and dance wearing only / the stretch marks, / my tiger stripes. / the cotton-mesh underwear, / my battle armor. / and the bloody pad, / my medal of honor.” This poem ends with a celebration of post-partum blood as a representation of the capabilities a woman’s body can achieve during pregnancy and childbirth. Following this poem, “Here” is a poem included in my prospectus which vividly describes the post-partum blood after miscarriage: “Her baptism was a wash of tears on her tiny flesh, sticky clots / sliding and staining my legs red as she slips down the drain.” This kind of bleeding is frequently experienced by pregnant women, yet are rarely mentioned in creative or medical literature.

I was completely unaware of how much bleeding I would experience in both post-partum situations from my delivery of my son and my miscarriage until a nurse described it to me after. Julia Bueno’s article in Psychology Today “Unpacking the Miscarriage Taboo: The menstrual taboo feeds our discomfort with miscarriage” describes how menstrual taboo, and arguably all bodily fluids women produce, further complicates efforts to normalize pregnancy loss because of its inherent relationship with menstruation. “Miscarriage also brings to mind a visceral and sometimes traumatic experience that keys into our general dislike, discomfort, and disgust with the ‘leakages’ of women’s bodies: sweat, vaginal discharge, blood, clots, and milk” (Bueno). Bueno argues that the de-shaming of all reproductive functions women’s bodies undergo will not only help normalize menstruation, but also birth and miscarriage.

In addition to miscarriage, pregnancy is also often left out of feminist discourse and canonical poetry. Motherhood complicates feminism in gender studies due to the idea that gender is a social construct in which all women are not necessarily meant to be
maternal, instead socially constructed to see motherhood as the female ideal. And yet many women, including many feminists, do in fact want to experience motherhood and pregnancy. Journalist Amy Westervelt writes in *The Guardian*, “The complexities of integrating motherhood into women’s identities do not go away simply because feminist theorists will it so. Rather, they pop up in cultural expressions that, while often moving, funny, or informative, tend to lack the sort of research and historical context we’d find in academic explorations of the topic” (2018). Contemporary conversations about motherhood and identity appear in pop-cultural texts as well.

In 2018, Netflix released two series about the complications of motherhood. Like Westervelt writes about motherhood represented in culture and media, these series, *The Letdown* and *Workin’ Moms*, do present commentary on pregnancy, motherhood, and feminism expectations for mothers in comedic expressions, but they are extremely limited in their scope and depth of critical discourse. For example, *Workin’ Moms* follows a group of working mothers in the Toronto area as they navigate returning to work, unwanted pregnancies, balancing autonomy, relationships, and motherhood, among others. However, the mothers in this group are extremely privileged and because of their entitlement, the show lacks the depth needed for many feminist mothers. Conversely, *The Letdown* does offer broader stories of mothers and the bodily, mental, and emotional changes each mother in the series confronts, providing a foundation for deeper discourse within domestic circles and academia to begin addressing the issues of feminism and motherhood.

The spiritual and Christian undertones of my poems are representative of my personal upbringing and beliefs, and yet are problematic given my pro-choice political
affiliations. The dichotomy of pro-life and pro-choice sentiments and politics in the United States often does not give space for women who identify with pro-choice politics and have experienced miscarriage. Within discussions of personhood, the community of pro-choice women with pregnancy loss is often underrepresented.

Kate Parsons’ article “Feminist reflections on miscarriage, in light of abortion” in the *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics* discusses this same topic as Parsons recounts her own experiences as a pro-choice feminist who experienced two miscarriages. “I eventually recognized that the dichotomy [between embryo/fetus and baby] I struggled with might be unique to a culture—U.S., specifically, arguably Western in general—in which debates over reproduction have focused almost solely on the moral status of fetuses, to the relative exclusion of women who make possible their development” (Parsons 3). This dichotomy can create conflicting reactions for a feminist who experiences pregnancy loss.

One of the poems in my thesis is a response to my husband asking me if my stance on abortion has changed since the miscarriage. The poem is a self-discovery in a series of little scenes that explores what the concept of personhood, often the central argument between the pro-life and pro-choice dichotomy, means to me and how my views shift depending on the scene, such as in my obstetrician’s medical office, in front of a woman’s clinic, and in the nursery. A common theme in Parsons’ essay is the fear of betrayal feminist women affected by miscarriage can face. A woman with pregnancy loss may feel that, by choosing to stay pro-choice, she will have to betray the weight of loss she may feel for the death of her unborn being’s life by seeing the miscarriage as only a non-viable embryo/fetus. Contrary, she may also feel she is betraying pro-choice
efforts and the woman’s role in personhood criteria which makes abortion and reproductive autonomy available.

In addition to the fear of betraying feminists by sharing their miscarriage experiences, society expects women who have had miscarriages to keep this experience silent. The article “Women aren’t meant to talk about miscarriage. But I’ve never been able to keep a secret” by Hadley Freeman and published on The Guardian, recounts Freeman’s miscarriage experience in the same medical office where she had an abortion 15 years earlier. Freeman’s telling of her personal experience is a direct answer to this societal constraint. “I’m too old now to worry about whether talking about this grosses men out, or lets feminism down, or whatever reason people give for telling women to keep it to themselves. Because of this silence, people don’t realise how traumatic miscarriage is until it happens to them—I certainly didn’t” (Freeman). The urge to keep miscarriage and pregnancy loss, both planned and unplanned, silent can have detrimental effects on the women who experience them. My poetry aims to tell my experience in order to offer solace and strength, and show validation, courage, and truth after pregnancy loss. Freeman says it best, “I knew then for sure that I’d never be able to pretend this hadn’t happened” (Freeman).

While I was processing my miscarriage, healing my body, and learning how to use poetry to unpack my feelings, I read The Carrying by Ada Limón. A collection of brave poems, exploring the power of vulnerability and grace of honesty, The Carrying gave me validation. Limón gives the reader experiences of carrying the self, children, family members and more. Limón’s title poem “The Carrying” brought me to tears the first time I read it. It paints the picture of a fall day in the country just beyond the busy
life of a highway, where horses are grazing. Limón recalls her family’s own mare pregnant with a foal, “her coat / thicker with the season’s muck, leans against / the black fence and this image is heavy / within me. How my own body, empty, / clean of secrets, knows how to carry her, / knows we were all meant for something” (Limón 2017). For the first time, I had read someone describe the uncanny feeling you have after a miscarriage of knowing your body should be full of new life, but is empty. Limón taught me it is perfectly normal to feel empty, and to acknowledge those feelings instead of running from them. My thesis is in part a tribute to this feeling with hopes of offering the same validation to another as Limón has given me.

The collection of poetry that follows is about motherhood, mothers’ bodies, miscarriage, loss, and hope. In keeping with the larger domestic/confessional poetic movements, this collection will urge transparency and reader discourse around the difficult topics of pregnancy loss, women’s post-partum bodies, maternal guilt, and grief. The poems draw upon a thematic arc: first exploring new motherhood, then transitioning into poems about my son and how motherhood has shaped both of us. Next, the miscarriage and the grief of my pregnancy loss. The collection ends with acceptance. Not necessarily hope, but the validation of claiming one’s self after a trauma and acknowledging it.
DEDICATION

To my children, Reid and Pearl—You have made me.

I planted a tree above you.

Full of life, death, rebirth, and sun.

All the things you are.
Must and Sandalwood

I turn off PBS Kids, flip the switch on the light-up walker singing Old McDonald, and close the alphabet book to stop the flashing red lights on each of the 26 pages. Curling into my husband on the family room floor, I wrap myself in his oversized blanket. The baby is asleep in his crib, and because we are too exhausted to move, let alone go up to bed, we lay there on the floor for a while. When we are especially tired, open and unguarded, too exhausted to embellish, or pretend, or soften the sharp edges, we talk about the year we spent apart in college before getting back together—

I lived off-campus that summer, subletting a room in a friend’s apartment, sharing with three other roommates right on the train tracks that sliced through town. The Amtrak sped by every couple of hours and cargo trains, filled to the metallic brim, interrupted the air every fifteen minutes with screeches as they fled down rails.

I rode my bike everywhere, and mostly to the Winona Public Library. I would tuck the front of my long skirts between and under my legs while I pedaled, down the water-town roads to keep it from catching in stiff river breezes. Steamboat Days were just around the corner and the whole city was smoldering.

As I stepped up the library’s smooth marble steps, slick Mississippi sweat dripped from my nose, streaming down my neck, pooling under my breasts, staining my tank tops. The smell of library, must and sandalwood, mixed with my own scent and filled my lungs. I veered toward the spiral staircase, up to the third floor on the south-east wing, away from the computers, the people, and the circulation desk.

This was the only corner of the library completely closed off from the rest of the stacks. The size of a boiler room and just as stifling and cramped, hugging you into the leaves. A domed skylight topped the secluded space, glass blocks laid a spiraling flower into the floor. Sitting in the epicenter of light with a book in my lap, I read as the dust floated.
Finger Brushes

Fingers jab the blank page with the tenacity only a truly spontaneous artist has before creating something new. Blobs of purple are deposited on the paper unceremoniously and, sure, why not, let’s add some green and see where this goes.

A left hand swipes the bulbous globs in an exaggerated hello to color. Feeling abandoned, the right hand counters with a smeary nice-to-meet-you gesture.

Working up a frenzy of intricate digit canyons and swirls, the artist moves his brushes to wipe away the forehead sweat of his creativity. Unbeknownst to the artist, his face becomes the second canvas touched by his instruments.

Purple lips and a green brow accent his deep-set eyes, given to him from his father, and the distinct canal below his nose. The artist couldn’t be prouder of the work created on the page, and yet, I can’t stop looking at the curves and divots left from sculpting his second canvas in my womb.
Mothers

I crave the mornings when you cling to my chest, crying and clawing
your little fingers into my shoulder because you don’t want me to leave daycare.
The mornings you look to your teacher, the one who mothers you during the day,
smiling and reaching for her embrace pummels my chest more than your teardrops.

You came home last week with a bump on your forehead.
Did you go to her for comfort? Her softness holding you until you stopped crying.
Did you think of me first—At all?

I only see the marks the day leaves on you.
Bumps and bruises, splashes of green paint.
Marinara sauce on your cheek from lasagna casserole.
The evidence you lived today.
The mementos I piece together.

I am your mother in the quiet moments.
The mother who wakes you in the dark depths of winter mornings.
Before the sun kisses your nose and witnesses you.
I am the one who lays you to sleep at night.
The one who wonders, which one of us is holding your hand in your dreams.
Carrying You

Two years ago, I carried you through the final weeks growing inside. You laid lengthwise across my belly, wrapping around my spine. Our anterior placenta providing a warming layer of oxygenating muscle. Keeping your body closer to mine, breathing life into you and removing toxins.

Six months ago, she carried our hearts while I rocked you to sleep in the nursery. Your baby sister’s tiny body left my uterus when she couldn’t let us carry her anymore. She needed more space to be my daughter, unlike you who craves my closeness. She carries me to lift you out of your crib in the morning and dress you. To kiss your cheeks and tickle your neck and comfort you when you cry.

Yesterday I carried you across two snowy acres on our land. Body layered; your sweaty forehead nestled under my chin. Breath steady with steam pouring from your lips. You let me carry your whole being while you slept. While you rest from playing with snow mounds and angels.
Selfish

They say having a baby either brings you closer, 
or irrevocably fucks up your relationship. 
Before there was baby, just you and me, it was easy to love you.

Lazy Saturdays watching The Office on Netflix. 
Unmoving and intertwined like a pretzel on the couch. 
Firey love-making just because it was snowing. 
So much time for me to be yours.

Today I’m learning I am selfish. I have changed. 
I can’t spend my time being just yours, nor do I want to. 
To be his and love you through him is my calling today. 
I want a partner who plays blocks and Legos on Saturdays, 
and hides and seeks behind window curtains and coffee tables.

I feel burning hot rage as you scream at him when he cries. 
I want to brand you with my eyes as you call him Shithead 
when he wakes up at 2am because he realizes he’s alone.

I sleep in fear when he’s sick, hoping he doesn’t wake you. 
I offer to bring the baby to bed with me so you can sleep, 
alone in the guest room and at peace.

I don’t understand how you can scold and blame him 
for getting the floor wet during bath time while he learns 
to kick his aquamarine legs and feel the release and see the magic 
of water slipping through his fingers. Pure joy.

How can you pin his legs down during diaper changes, 
and not be affected when a layer of his trust leaves 
his scared eyes with each tear?
I know parenting is more difficult than we could have ever imagined. Being alive entirely for another person isn’t felt the same way.

When you say you like indirect parenting:
What does that mean?
How can you like washing bottles more than bathing toes?
Where’s the joy in emptying the diaper pail?
Come pretend to fly with us.

It hurts when he doesn’t want to go to you, but he’s selfish, too.
My Tiger Stripes

I squint and pretend
they’re hallucinations,
bright made-up waves
of the brain.
I call them,
field bling.
I call them,
fancy creepies.
—Ada Limón “Field Bling”

At the end of the night
when the baby
finally sleeps,
I stand still dizzy
from hours of
swaying my hips,
lulling him to sleep.
The sleep exhaustion
from the first days
of motherhood
tricks my brain and I want
to use my last ounce of energy
to dance in my underwear.
Alone in my dark bedroom
I strip my clothes
until I’m left
with a blood-soaked pad
and oversized
cotton panties.
It’s the first time in days
I see my breasts
as breasts
and not milk machines.
Putting the buds into my ears
I crank the first song
and dance wearing only
the stretch marks,
my tiger stripes.
the cotton-mesh underwear,
my battle armor.
and the bloody pad,
my medal of honor.
Here

My belly is empty even though it should be full. Will the feeling my body is a tomb ever lessen, or with time, feel mine?

When will I finally be able to say out loud:

I will never feel her breath on my cheek while saying goodnight.
I will never jump with surprise when her little kicks or hiccups sending tremors to my spine.
I will never know exactly where or when she died.

Her baptism was a wash of tears on her tiny flesh, sticky clots sliding and staining my legs red as she slips down the drain.

She’s not here, but I don’t know how to be here.

I feel her phantom somersaults and stretches pulling at my ligaments and soul.
How can I sleep without worrying her soul feels abandoned?
I need someone to tell me the only affirmation I want to hear.
The one I’m afraid to believe and not believe.

She will find you again.
I will feel her in me again.
We’ll feel again.
I will be her mama again.
What to Expect During Miscarriage

Signs and symptoms of a miscarriage might include:
Vaginal spotting or bleeding
As you pass your little one through your body.
Pain or cramping in your abdomen or lower back
From feeling your disassociation.
Fluid or tissue passing from your vagina
Knowing she’s leaving while you beg her to stay.

If you have passed fetal tissue from your vagina,
Know that this little light of life loved you as you did her.
place it in a clean container
So you can hold her in your hands one last time.
and bring it to your healthcare provider’s office or the hospital for analysis
to tell you it is ok to grieve, that you are a mother, that she was your daughter.

Keep in mind that most women who experience vaginal spotting or bleeding in the first trimester go on to have successful pregnancies.
And if you do have another baby, it is still ok to miss her.
And if you don’t—We know you are a parent to little lost one.
We who have miscarried before you.

Your experiences are true.
We see you.
We will carry you.

—Mayo Clinic “Miscarriage Symptoms”
Half-Woman’s Rhyme

There lives a woman who is Half-Woman.
The living half of woman is on Earth, the other half in Dark Place.
On Earth, Half-Woman goes by many names, her favorite being Mama.

In Dark Place, she goes by Wrath.
She goes by Body’s Hate.
She goes by Bereaved.
She is Night’s Mourning.
She is the singer to those that go by Little Lost Life,
Who eternally rock in cradles of walnut and pinecone.

In the deep of Dark Place, she keeps the Nursery of Miscarried.
She sings to them—

Rock-a-bye my baby,
She sings to the bark.

When her bellows sound,
Your memorial tree rocks.

When the branches break,
The purple leaves fall.

And on the grave will come Mama,
Broken soul and all.
Prayer

Now I lay you down to sleep,
I pray to Mother your soul to keep,
If you should leave before I wake,
I pray to Mother my soul to take.

My Daughter,
Who art all around me,
Hallowed be Her name,
Thy embrace shall come,
Your love never done,
In life as it is hereafter.

Give me this day your whispering breath;
And help me forgive Mother for Your death,
As You have forgiven me thereafter;
And lead me away from the shadows,
Into salvation of jade meadows.

For thine is my womb.
My life.
And my death.
Forever and ever.

Your Mother.
To All the Little Lost Ones

Now that my blood is among you,
I see you all so much clearer.

I would hold you all in my arms,
in the abyss of your gestations.

Keep you warm with my breath
acknowledging names for you all.

—

Although you weren’t all mine,
I will love you like my own.

As I love your parents’ grief as my own.
Whether by choice or fate.

We are all just trying to be.
The best that we can.
Chasing Her

Where are you little girl?
Are you playing
hide and seek with mama?

Not under the bed,
behind the curtains,
inside the closet.

Where are you little one?
Beneath the willow,
through my veins,
among the fawns.

I walk alongside the creek
behind our house,
chasing your spirit.

I hope one day you’ll jump out,
laughing with toddler delight,
surprising me in my steps.

I look up from the path
to try to see your face
for the first time,

but the sun blinds me
as you run into the gully,
below a fallen tree,
or beyond the ridge,
and I walk on.
Pearl

I named my daughter the day after she died.
Her tiny life encapsulated in an iridescent orb.
The name suits the delicate face I see in my mind.

I speak her name at night when it’s just us two.
Whispering, I ask her how her soul is tonight.
Are you warm and safe, my girl, encircled by light?

I tell her she’s welcome to nestle inside my belly to sleep.
My heart plays to her the sweet drums of our lullaby.
Once a tiny egg, and now more.

I am her oyster shell, she is my Pearl.
Comments

For all the mamas out there who have experienced the heartache of miscarriage—know that you are NOT alone, that I SEE you, and that I LOVE you. Today’s the due date of my little one I lost last fall.

—A Post from My Facebook Profile, April 19, 2019

I’m so sorry for your loss Michelle. I love the idea of a tree.

So sorry, didn’t know.

So sorry, Michelle. Hugs to you.

Love you all.

I too know what that feels like. My heart is with you

So sorry Michelle! Hugs to you.

Oh so sorry Michelle. It’s a big loss.

If you need something, just let me know. I love you so much

Love you all so much. Will always be here for you.

xxoo love you

So sorry, Michelle! I feel your pain.

Sending thoughts and prayers

Thinking of you and love you all

I’m so sorry Michelle. Unfortunately, I too know how that feels.

I can’t even imagine the pain. If you need anything let me know.
Violets

I tell myself that pieces of my daughter’s spirit were left everywhere we went while I miscarried her.

In my cubicle at work in Rice Lake,  
the place I try to keep back all of her.

In the gas station where I buy milk and eggs,  
the extra stop I make before I face going home.

In my shower off the master bedroom,  
the drain where most of her disappeared.

In the NICU wing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison,  
the first time I held my nephew.

In my son’s dark bedroom at home,  
the rocking chair at night when I think of her most.

I imagine violets sprouting from these resting places.  
Fuzzy leaves on expense reports.  
Honey sweet gasoline.  
Preemies swaddled in velvet petals.  
Her breath sways their stems while she sings our lullaby in my ear.
Reflections

I used to see myself through an antique looking glass.

Distorted images marked by distress,
flakes of exposed raw metal and mercury.

The reflection I saw showed a woman
trapped, unknowingly keeping herself there.

Then you came from me,
and I was seen.

You have shown me I don’t need my glass.
That my life shouldn’t be filtered through grief.

My children, my loves, you see me.
I try to see myself like you see me.

Each day I am stronger,
a little bit braver to let you go and keep you.

When I am able to put down the glass,
I’ll look up and see my smile reflected in your eyes.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. “Repeated Miscarriages.”


