

2001

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Recommended Citation

Kaschock, Kirsten. "Imagined Births: A Collection of Disturbances." *The Iowa Review* 31.2 (2001): 50-52. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.5385>

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Kirsten Kaschock

IMAGINED BIRTHS: A COLLECTION OF DISTURBANCES

I.

A coiled length, low in my abdomen.
I add amen to amen in lowered voice.
(Mustn't let on I fear this.)

A coiled length, slow as it abandons.
Gravity unwinds me. I am uterus,
hourglass, am counted down.

A cool wrenching, flow—and absence
of flow. Prayer has not opened me.
I have been split, simply. Shed.

II.

The child was meant to be eaten. Moments
after the birth, the doctor and nurses found

they could not help themselves any longer.
And I was revealed: the way I watched.

The non-metallic way he smelled (bloody
as he was), his translucent skin, his muscles—

They were so hungry. Although he did not mean it
his cry was like a bleat. He was so pink—

There was not another way to experience him.
They did not clean him; they did not cover my eyes.

I watched them eat my son. They were
so hungry. It was as if I had delivered bread.

III.

Week 16:

I have felt nothing.

Legless and armless it swims inside me.

I am something's ocean.

Week 19:

What I would give for a *tap, tap*—

A tiny worker

with hammer and chisel,

loosening my inner bricks.

Week 38:

Rough hand and pickaxe, a small child

slitting sandbags with a pocketknife.

Either way, I am

the Netherlands.

IV.

I remember that I was pregnant. And then I was not. I found my son in the swamp. Except I did not know him.

He fell and I tried to put the thing back together, the swollen joints, the long bones greeny like crape myrtle trunks. Immediately, the thing began to stink.

Feathers plucked but not cleaned and glued with lard and sap to cloth. Insects crawling all over, and me, knee-deep in silt, working at this as if I were just shelling crabs, pulling flesh and waste from the hard edges, scraping remnants of it from machinery. I was not familiar.

I pretended I didn't know what it was. An angel-thing. Voodoo. I kept from retching by not looking at the whole. This part over here, still pulsing, I connected to that part, coughing and sputtering. I needed blueprints.

Diagrams. Something.

And then, I saw them in my head. How he was supposed to look. How he would look in heaven. I thanked God for giving me that respite, before the thing got still. Sunk.

V.

Doorways become events.

They bind. One can be caught, there.

One could be held, at the threshold, for too much time.

But not a queen, not against her will.

I am slow-moving, and thus regal.

Having increased, I am large, and know.

I can tell the future:

He shall be a Virgo.

A woman will lose her center.

Having been a doorway, she will find that doorways seek
her release.