

The Plunge
First Place Poetry 2004

Meconium-stained fluid, a few decels
Just another midnight delivery, I thought
Stay calm

The Muslim couple asked my attending, a man, to stay outside the labor room
Banished to the hall, he coaches from behind the curtained door

Finally, the birth, a boy
Joy, and prayers made on his knees from the father

The thin and twisted tether, fragile, refused to finish its final task
Tearing, slowly shredding in my hand, forsaking the placenta

A brief conference with the man behind the curtain
Seeking answers like Dorothy in Oz

And then, the plunge

If this primip could endure labor without a drop of painkiller
I could enact a rescue mission for the placenta, something I'd seen but not yet done

In to the elbow, scooping, separating, trying to remember to breath
Now a death grip on that slippery sack, pulling, coaxing

The cervix closing on my small wrist
Fear that too much more will tear to bits
The special prize the family will take home for holy rites

The afterbirth comes, relief is born in me
More profound than when the baby emerged
It is a miracle! It is wholly intact

The mother smiles. What a lovely birth she says, the next day
Never knowing my fear, the courage it took for me to take the plunge

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