

IN THOSE DAYS

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poetry

In workshop,
the instruction
was to
lose control,
allow
messiness,
overflow,
duende.

*But don't interrupt the narrative,
we want to know what happens next.
Maybe try a poem.*

But what there is to say is
like David Wilcox's song,
*When you love somebody
and they dick you around,
doesn't it really suck?*

Except mine would be
*When you love somebody
and they're sick unto death,
doesn't it really suck?*

And besides,
overflow
can be
dangerous
unproductive

When the water went over the spillway
and scoured away the rock
the first time
at least there was the Devonian Gorge—
all those beautiful fossils

But the second time there
wasn't even that
and both times
afterwards
you had to
toss photo albums
tear out drywall
replace appliances
no matter how you
whined

But if you really want to know
I could tell you that in those days

I walked around
the hospital
without a bra
on my sore swollen
red-streaked breasts
with headlights
and circles
of milk and lanolin
on my t-shirt
and when I saw
myself in the
mirror sometimes
I wept
for shame

I shouted
down a summer street
to my husband
that I couldn't run

so fast to get
to my baby
because it made me
bleed too much

I moaned
No no no no no
no no
and banged my head
against the toilet
bowl when
they said
my second
boy was sick too, and
the doula cradled
her arm
between me and the
porcelain

Bare-assed on the
bathroom floor, I shouted
Who's the Fellow? and
If there's any doubt
just intubate him
thinking

I was on call nights
in this hospital
when you were
just some M2
even if
Physician's Assistant Admissions
says sticking tubes
up your own baby's nose and
holding them down
while someone shoves a needle
in their spine
isn't clinical experience

Later they said the Fellow had gone
into neonatology
because he liked
order
control
quiet
That the bathroom floor
with all the shit and blood
(mine and the baby's)
and Eric's ruined shoes
had horrified him.
As though *that*
was the horrific thing
in that room.

Once after pumping
at two in the morning
I called the hospital
to check on my baby
lay down next to my husband
and began
to weep
then cry
then sob
then made noises
that don't have names
great howls from the belly
and for once Eric
didn't say *What's wrong*
or *It'll be okay* or
don't wake up the neighbors.
He just held me in his arms
until I slowed and stopped
and then we went back to sleep

That's how it was in those days.
If you really want to know.