

Everything

Prologue

Baby Cleo screamed. Her muscles contracted, then expanded with something else working with her. Then someone was beating her in the back and cutting something. And then she sucked a gas into her body. She instantly recognized it as Oxygen. O16, she immediately thought. How do I know that, she wondered? Later, she was warm, sucking something nice, tasting something warm and sweet. She was exhausted. She slept.

She never expected this. She was warm, happy, completely aware that she was what she was. She began to know things. She never knew how she knew what she knew, but she accepted it as part of her whole being. She liked where she was. It was warm. Eventually she could hear but not clearly. Noises. Gurgles. Sounds, but nothing very clear. Sometimes she made sounds, but nobody answered. She wondered why everything was so confining, so sometimes she stretched. When she did that, she felt wonder and the warmth pushed back. Sometimes she kicked for exercise. When she did this, she often felt some resistance. She was exercising with someone else.

Some big person held her, held her with soft hairy arms. She felt warm things on her cheek. Lips, she immediately knew, were doing loving things to her. Often, most often, she was wrapped in fabric. She was always cuddled. She yelled something, but the large person didn't know she was trying to say "nice, and thank you."

Mostly she slept. Breathing was grueling work. It had been so nice in there. But while she slept, while she sucked, while she eliminated her waste, she thought about things. She had been birthed knowing everything.

I

Oh, I love this milk stuff. I love breasts. I love baths. I wish I could speak. They seem not to understand my sounds. These two people are called my 'Mommy' and my 'Daddy' and I feel warmth from them. She seems to understand when I am uncomfortable. She pats me on my back gently if I have some gas. I make loud noises when I need something, but she and this other warm person doesn't understand sometimes. But I can understand every thing they say. They are troubled when I make loud noises. They think that my

loudness is related to food elimination but I am trying to talk to them. Why don't they understand me? I understand them perfectly.

II

"Oh, God, that was painful, Justin. Look at this little thing. How strange to hold some of me in my own arms." Greedy little girl. Seems to like my milk though. I wonder what she is thinking? It must be awesome to be born. Too bad we can't remember what it was like. Sweet Cleo. You are my glory.

"Uh oh. She's crying. I think she needs to have her diaper changed. Justin, will you get the nurse please? We need a diaper."

III

A lady in white just put me down in my little bed in the baby room next to Silvia, my best friend. There are 20 little people like me in this room. We have all been born during the last couple of days. We can talk to each other and we often make a lot of noise.

Silvia was born at exactly the same time I was. She has beautiful brown skin and a sweet smile. She is dying. She has something very bad growing inside of her. but I know it can be fixed. So does she.

I love Silvia. She has wonderful feelings when she isn't hurting. We talk about how we were birthed, what our parents are like, about milk and breasts, about the ladies in white called nurses. Nobody in the hospital seems to know what is wrong with her. The nurses come in and I try to talk to them. They think I need a breast and milk and a change of linen. And I do, but I want to save Silvia. I need to tell them that a chemical which can be distilled from common dandelions can save her life. I cry, I wail...but they don't understand. I think they haven't figured this out yet. I eliminate. Some of the nurses call my elimination "shit" so when I am upset I shit. I do it sometimes because I need to. Sometimes I do it to get attention. Sometimes I do it for exercise.

"Silvia...are you ok?"

Silvia is in great pain. I wonder if we both tried some way to tell our parents what she needs if it would work. I say to her, fix your mind on Doctor Rodriguez. He knows what to do. On the count of three, focus on his cerebral cortex. Keep saying dandelions, dandelions, dandelions...."

Good idea, Bad idea,. We got him to think about dandelions and nearly exploded his cortex. She left the room holding her head.

I love Silvia. I make loud noises. She is dying. No one can hear what I'm trying to say. They think I need a change in diapers but please God...I need a change in weeping. If only I could make my noises be talking.

IV

What is wrong with Silvia? No matter what I do she cries. I have asked the doctors if there is anything wrong, and they say 'Just be patient. She has a little colic, that's all.'" I don't believe it. She's nursing now and is quiet. I hope they are right.

Janice, my oldest daughter, brought me some flowers. She is so sweet and thoughtful even at six years old. I asked the nurse to bring a glass of water so I could keep the bouquet of dandelions fresh.

Oh, now Silvia is crying again, screaming actually. "Nurse! Nurse! Please come here immediately!"

V

I love Silvia. They brought her back to her bed. She finally stopped crying and lay still for a long time, then she said, "Goodbye, Cleo."

She is gone. I can't stop yelling. I couldn't tell them how to fix her.

VI

Look at her in her little hospital bed. Sleeping finally. She is so helpless. All she can do is eat, sleep, cry and shit. She was crying all morning. Nothing would quiet her. She yelled bloody murder for hours until she finally was exhausted.

I hope nothing is wrong with her. A little baby girl who was in the bassinet next to Cleo's, died this morning. It was a complete surprise to everyone. The doctors thought that she had some mild colic. Her dad, Tom, and I hung out

together all day yesterday while our wives were having their babies. He went in to the delivery room and saw his daughter being born.

We were in the waiting room, talking and sharing pictures when the doctor came in looking very grave. When the doctor left, Tom began to cry. He wept piteously for ten minutes. I sat next to him and hugged him.

Then he got up, wiped his eyes and went to his wife's room. I wanted to be alone for awhile. Then I got up and walked over to look at Cleo. What a miracle.

VII

I am in a place called 'home' now. I have a warm, fuzzy bed with things whirling above my head. My Mommy has some funny theories. She thinks that if she wiggles her tongue I will do it too. So I do. It makes her laugh when I do it.

My Daddy just looks at me a lot and picks me up. He juggled me too much one time and I threw up all over his head. I laughed because he was so surprised, but he didn't seem too happy about it. Now he bangs me on the back gently so I can get rid of some gas, but he is more careful how he throws me around.

Sometimes he comes in my room and just sits down in a nice big chair for a long time. He thinks I'm asleep, but I just like him to be here.

There is something I don't understand so I have to think about it. Why does he have tiny breasts? He doesn't use them for anything.

I have been thinking about war. I heard something on the talking box in the living room while I was eating. I wonder if war can be cured? Can it be fixed like Silvia could have been fixed?

When I finish eating, Mommy puts this thing that feels like a breast into my mouth. I suck it, but they can't fool me. No milk.

A man came to visit Daddy today. He picked me up and held me. His breath smelled terrible. I didn't like his eyes. After a minute I started to cry. I have a bad feeling about him. Why does Daddy like him?

What a creep that guy is. I wish Justin wouldn't have anything to do with him, Every time I see him he undresses me with his eyes. I was terrified when he picked up Cleo. I grabbed her as soon as I could when she started crying. Sometimes he calls here at the house even though he knows Justin isn't home. I know what he wants but I'm afraid that Justin will get angry if I tell him.

Jack came over today. I haven't seen him for a long time, ever since he got fired. We used to bowl and play golf together. He doesn't look good. We talked for awhile and I let him pick up the baby, but I didn't feel good about it. I stood close by just in case but Lavinia saw him and abruptly took her.

It looks like he's been drinking. Every time Lavinia came into the room he stared at her. I was glad when he got up to leave. He went to kiss Lavinia goodbye, but she turned her head away and just said goodbye to him without a hug or even a kiss on the cheek, still holding Cleo close.

I told him not to come back. He asked me what was wrong? I walked him out the door and down the walkway to his car.

I said, "Look, Jack, you need to get your act together. Lavinia doesn't feel comfortable around you any more either. Even the baby was upset by you."

"Well fuck you, asshole," he shouted at me, flipping me the bird as he got into his car, started it and gunned the engine, wheels squealing as he left..

He's been drinking, that's for sure. I hope we've heard the last of him. He is unpredictable now. He never remember him cursing when we worked together.

When I came back inside I noticed that the baby had calmed down. I wonder what he did that upset her? Nothing as far as I could see.

VII

Mommy was crying today. A letter came, she opened it while feeding me.

I can crawl now. They put me in a cage during the day with a lot of stuffed animals, but I would like to go all over the house like they do.

I heard her talking about her brother Steve who is in a place called the army. My Daddy always talks about how the two of them playing golf and went fishing together. They didn't talk about the letter, but I know it was bad news. My Daddy was crying too. I wanted to comfort him, so I yelled. He picked me up and rocked me, hugged me, kissed me. Then he took Mommy in his arms and rocked back and forth, both of them weeping. I stopped yelling. They needed to be together and I couldn't tell them how sorry I was.

Then Mommy read the letter aloud. It said that Steve was helping a child that was wounded. Someone killed him while he was carrying the boy to the hospital. It was done with a gun. I had to go to my information to understand guns. Why would anyone want to do that?

I tried to contact Steve. There was a very weak trace of anima left. We were able to taste each other. I want to tell my mom that he is ok. When I try really hard to tell her something, I usually get a breast. That's ok too, but why can't I tell her what is going on? I try to think to her, but her soul is too busy to listen.

Maybe I can distract her by playing with Molly's bone.

I can't cry any more. Watching the baby on the floor gives me some peace. She is playing with a rubber toy shaped like a bone. Look how she holds it, as if she is trying to figure out what it is for. It used to belong to Molly, our dog, and when she died I kept the rubber toy to remember her by. Cleo, for some reason, took to it as soon as she could focus on anything so I sanitized it and let her play with it. It is her favorite.

She's tasting it and throws it across the room scooting on her knees after it, giggling. Poor Steve. He loved to play with the baby. How can people be so cruel?

VIII

I have been thinking about how things work. Everything is made up of little gasses. Daddy is an engineer so I can tell he knows about some of this. Sometimes when he visits me at night he talks about little things that are made of material from glass. He just does it to entertain me. He thinks I just like to

hear his voice, and I do, but doesn't know that I know more about them than he does. Lots more.

He calls them "transistors," and how they make electrons and holes go through something he calls "junctions" and make other electrons accelerate and increase the size of anything with electrons that comes into it. I find his explanation too simple, and mostly wrong, but it works. Daddy likes something called a Fourier Transform. When he explained what it was I knew right away why it was useful. I agree that it is elegant.

I have thought about how the strengths of atoms and electrons and magnets and gravity all work together. The answer is so wonderful that I started making noises to my dad to tell him how they dance in the most wonderful rhythms. He just think I'm cute and picks me up to play with me.

Oh well. I like to play with him too.

I've been trying to put together my speech at the conference next week so I rehearsed it with Cleo while I played with her. The upshot of my thesis is that we are reaching the limit of switching speeds using transistors. Some of the more exotic materials we are experimenting with seem to defy the laws of particle physics.

Some cosmologist wrote an article in Scientific American this month explaining why light can't be both a wave and a particle. We know some theory is yet to be developed linking all the forces together at a microscopic level, but there doesn't seem to be any Isaac Newtons around these days.

Cleo was lying on her back playing with the mobile suspended just above her from the ceiling, swiping at the birds, kicking them with her feet. When I started reading my speech she stopped as if she was trying to understand what I was saying. Isn't that cute?

IX

I felt that Mommy was in pain. While I nursed, she was crying. At first I thought it was for her brother, Steve, but is a different kind of crying. She is sick. While I drank milk I eased my spirit into her. She has an infection in her

tummy. It is serious. Daddy came in and asked her what was the matter? She said, "It's nothing."

But it is something. This is very bad with her blood. I looked into her bones to see the cells. No red ones are bubbling like they should. I stopped nursing and began to make sounds. I know how to fix this. She needs some of the blood making machinery from my bones. She put me on her shoulder and patted me for awhile, and I hate to admit it but I fell asleep.

When I awoke in my nice warm bed the house was silent. There was a new person sitting in the big chair. She was humming a song. "Hush little baby, don't say a word. Nanny will buy you a mocking bird." What a nice melody. I'll have to search my information to find out what a mocking bird is.

Where is Mommy? I should be silent too. I should talk to God.

X

Mommy is in a place called a hospital. I heard Daddy tell the nice lady that stayed with me that they went to a good doctor and they found out it was what I already knew it was. I am glad that there are people that know at least some of the things I know. He told her that she needed some of my blood making machines. Why didn't they listen to me? I knew that.

The lady dressed me up in my nicest pink dress. I have a bonnet with lace. I am so pretty now even though pink is not my best color. I heard them say that I am going to be able to help mommy. I knew that. Good.

I hope it doesn't hurt.

XI

Everyone is making noise and dancing and having a good time. Mommy picks me up and hugs me. Daddy takes me and throws me up in the air and catches me. There is music coming out of the music thing and Daddy is dancing with me. He likes it when I make these noises in my throat.

Now I get to see an old person called "Poppy." He talks to me a lot when he visits. I think he can understand a little of what I make noises about because sometimes he just sits and listens to me for a long time. I wish my tongue and

lips could make the right sounds so I could tell everyone all the things I know. I'm trying to do exercises at night to make them strong, but I always fall asleep.

It is my birthday. I am sitting in a chair with long legs and a tray in front. They call it my high chair, and that makes sense. I have a funny hat on. There is a big piece of sweet thing on my tray. I try to pick it up to eat it, but my hand makes a mess. I am upset I can't do it, so I push my mouth right down on top of it and shove it in my mouth. Yummmmmmmmm! Everyone is laughing. What a nice time we are all having. The sweet stuff is all over my face.

Mommy is better. We stayed in the hospital for a long time together and slept together a lot. I don't nurse any more so it is more difficult for me to find out how she is. I think she is ok, though. Her color is pink again and she laughs. The doctor was a very smart lady. She liked me too and explained everything to me even though she didn't think I understood. She has a very simple view of the dreadful cell killers in my Mommy's body, but her concept is good enough to make Mommy well....with my blood machine.

I thought about how the universe actually started this morning, but I really had to work hard to remember. A man called Einstein had a good idea about how all the forces work together, but he couldn't see the dance that I know. Another man, Feynman, thinks that everything is made of little things called particles and that nothing is certain. They are both right and both wrong. I wish I could tell Daddy about the forces dancing. Maybe when I learn to talk.

XII

I have been working really hard on my tongue and lip and throat muscles. Today I made a sound that made my Mommy jump up and down and clap her hands and scream for my Daddy to come quickly. I tried to say "Mommy" but all I could get out was "Ma, Ma."

When I woke up this morning, I couldn't remember how cancer works but I know Mommy is well. We went back to the nice doctor lady and she said that all the bad things were good now. They all said nice things about me and it made me feel good. I made a sound by slapping my hands together and they all laughed.

Why am I forgetting things? I am afraid.

XIII

I go to a place called day school almost every day while Mommy goes to a place she calls “work.” Miss Ann is my day school lady and she is really nice to me. I can run all over the playground and climb on the high, flat ladder called the “monkey bars.”

Mommy laughs when I hang upside down on them. My dress falls in my face and I guess the other kids like to see me do it too because some of them point at me and say a poem really loudly about a country called “France.”

Now I can say some things and my Mommy and Daddy and Miss Ann and my friends can understand me.

I am forgetting everything.

Daddy sits with me in the evening and talks to me, but not like he used to. Now he talks to me in just the words I can speak, not in his own words. I wanted to tell him last night about the dancing forces, but I don’t remember how they work any more.

We watched the news together. He told me that we have a war now, but he said it was hard to explain. I think I used to know how to stop them, but now I don’t get it. Why would people want to kill each other?

Maybe I don’t have to know everything any more.

I can still talk to God.