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# The Brahmlic Egg

MARGOT SINGER

*Every particle in this body is continually changing; no one has the same body for many minutes together, and yet we think of it as the same body.*

— Swami Vivekananda

**For** eleven weeks I threw up in the late afternoons. I shivered and broke out in sweats, grew bloated and round in the cheeks. My breasts felt tender. My tongue swam in my mouth. I ate grapefruit and soft-boiled eggs, loosened

my waistband, fell asleep on the floor under my desk. Inside my womb, cells collided and combined, broke apart and formed again. I pressed my cheek to the carpet and shut my eyes against the light. I listened to my blood.

What secrets does the body hold? I was oblivious, dumb, a dupe. We moved through space, my body and I, but I knew nothing.

I slept on my left side, knees curled to chest. I had orgasms in my dreams. Outside my bedroom window, the moun-

tains stretched out their flanks in the spring light. At night the moon slid past the edge of the skylight above my bed, a watchful eye. I felt a pulling inside my abdomen, like loose skin stretching tight. I sat cross-legged on the floor with my hands resting palms-up on my knees. I pressed the tip of my tongue against my teeth, closed my eyes, and focused on my brow's center point, the third eye. A black planet pulsed and radiated behind my lids. I tried to sense the vibration of the universe, to hear the sound of *Om*.

*When you see the unborn, uncreated, unconditioned, you are liberated from everything.*

— Siddhartha Gautama

**Sometimes** there is blood, but not always. Sometimes there is no sign at all. Sometimes there is just a brown smudge, like a trace of mud, which is what happened to me. It might have been nothing, but when I saw it, I knew. It came to me that the flooding queasiness, the heavy fatigue, the metallic taste in my mouth had all disappeared, as if they had seeped through a pinhole too small to perceive, leaving behind the familiar self I'd been longing for all those weeks. I didn't wake my husband. I lay there next to him in the dark, listening to him breathe.

In the morning I lay back on the crinkling paper of an examination table and stared up at the fluorescent lights. The nurse-midwife squirted jelly on my stomach and slid her heartbeat monitor in a slow circle over my pelvic bones. We waited for the rapid *woof-woof-woof* of a seed-size heart, but heard only the slower thumping of my own. "Don't worry," the nurse said. "It's probably just too soon for us to hear a heartbeat. Maybe you've miscalculated the due date. Been feeling sick?" She wiped the goo off my belly with a paper towel. "Then probably everything is fine."

She sent me down to the ultrasound department, where I waited for an hour as a succession of couples emerged from the examination room smiling and clutching videotapes. "Congratulations," I heard the doctor tell them. "Everything looks fine." In a small office across from where I sat, a technician prepared syringes for drawing blood. To amuse a fussy child, she took a latex glove out of a box and blew it into a balloon, a bloodless hand.

The radiologist called me in. "I'm sure everything is fine," he said cheerfully. In the grainy darkness, I tried to breathe evenly. Gray shapes formed and re-formed on the monitor screen. "Here's your uterus," he said, pressing down hard with the probe. A pear-shaped outline shaded gray slid onto the screen like a misshapen moon. There was only gray. The radiologist moved the probe up and around, then set it down. "I'm very sorry," he said.

I'd imagined a dead baby shaped like a seahorse, knees curled to chin, like the photographs in biology books. But there was nothing but darkness, blank and black as outer space.

*This body, formed out of the five elements by the Creator, is known as brahma-anda (the brahmic egg). It is created for the experience of pleasure and pain.*

— *The Shiva Samhita*

**"One** in every four pregnancies spontaneously aborts," my doctor told me. This was something I had not known. I stood in her office, my wet umbrella in hand, and cried. She gave me a hug. It was a "blighted ovum," she explained, which sounded like a biblical plague. "The fetus just doesn't develop. Something goes wrong for reasons we don't understand. It is not your fault." I nodded like a child and took the tissue she offered. Then she said, "The bleeding should start soon."

I called my husband from my cellphone in the car. He said we could try again. I called my mother when I got home. She said, "Honey, you know that these things happen for the best." My mother endured six miscarriages after she had me, one a girl born alive at nineteen weeks whom they didn't even try to save. My mother spent months on bed rest after each one. I remember coming home from school to find her propped on pillows, knitting, or supine on the couch, reading. I remember her crying a lot. Eventually she had my brother, nearly nine years after she'd had me.

My girlfriend took me shopping at the mall. When I told her the news, I didn't know what tense to use: "I've had a miscarriage," or "I'm having one," or "I'll have one soon." She simply said, "I'm sorry," which I was grateful for. I didn't fit into any clothes in my regular size, so I just watched her try on shoes and tried not to think of the stunted amniotic sac inside me, its useless placenta still obliviously pumping out hormones.

I walked through the cemetery near our house, the tombstones stained gray in the spring rain. Magpies chattered and wheeled around the pines. I looked at the engraved names: German, Swedish, Irish, an Italian, a Slav, a small section that were all Chinese. Husbands and wives and children lay side by side beneath the ground. Under a sycamore I saw a half-size marble headstone for a child.

Can you mourn a death when there's no body? When there never was a heartbeat? The Talmud says life begins at twenty weeks, when the child quickens in the womb. You can't light a *yahrzeit* candle in mourning or recite the *kaddish* prayer for a fetus. You can't leave a pebble on a grave.

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