

## STRETCH MARKS

1

It is said in the Talmud that the child in the womb,  
flexing her floating sac of the world, knows all, knows  
the name of the angel who wrestled with Jacob, knows

and dreams, dreams all molecules her hands will make,  
bowties of atoms centered by platinum, carboxypeptidase.  
She remembers the constellations' pause as Abraham

held the knife over Isaac, and later, Dachau trains.  
Reaching, through her mother's eyes, she blows life  
into weeds and carbon chains from comets' tails;

and marks the lust, just that, of her father in her  
conception. In volutes of gene threads and shells,  
what a time to know! And then . . . a time to be born.

As she is pushed into the colder world, an angel  
strikes her on the head, and makes her forget all  
she knew inside. The mark of the angel is on our lip.

2

Why does the angel do this? Today they don't announce  
themselves, these wheels of God, and, if questioned,  
they say: I'm just following orders. Is he Ialdabaoth,

the workman demiurge, who without a host of technicians  
and genetic engineering knew, just knew, how to mold  
muscle, sheathe a nerve, the nitty-gritty, bone fitting

into bone, of creation? No one's left to believe in him.  
So Ialdabaoth, unemployed by this sexy human trick  
of procreation, strikes out at children. Or maybe

it's Yahweh, not my Hebrew one Lord, but his dark Gnostic  
mask. He keeps men from unhusking the fallen sparks within,  
knowing the blue sky that is also the sea of their spirit.

3

Rabbi Baruch of Mezbizh explained it thus: If the child were not made to forget, she would brood on her death, the count of years and seconds left

audible like a repeater of death in her mind. Contemplating her death she would not light candles, or build a house. So the angel makes her forget.

4

But I think God, who knows, doubts (which is to know) his design works. His winged observer marks the onset of contractions, hydraulics of the amniotic

fluid. The angel is drawn into timing, hears breathing, hoarser, instructed. He touches, an angel's touch, the dilating neck of the womb. The child's

head is pushed against her own breast, the occiput leads, rotates into the pelvic floor until bones won't give, forcing the head to turn, shaping

a conformation that angles up; all this takes time even if it is not a first birth. As the head emerges, a thin shoulder slides into the place of resistance;

more pain, a push turning the face into the mother's thigh. Confronted with this congruence of form and motion, the angel is the one struck dumb, forgets, must attend

every birth. The mother stirs, unprompted, to the after-birth; the daughter, like a seal coming up from its deep dive, depressurizes, gasps for this unforgettable air.