**From Ma**

Celine Low

My child not yet born, I want you to know

before I’d even met your father I planned

your life, lined the stars up glow by glow

at your little toes, from the second

your soft head slips from me like a startled

fish streaking across the fair sheets flooded

by my blood, and I, breathless yet fueled

by your cry, kiss your crinkled forehead.

Yes, you should know: I’ll pave you a smooth

well-lit path for toddling. I’ll have, by then,

tripped over and buried the big, bad truths.

You can be curious, but within the playpen;

remember I bled so you wouldn’t have to.

Remember this when you see your own

child stray, like you will when you rue

the brave, brittle, blown—

glass world I made for you. You will embrace

the legions of locusts, the prowling lions, and in

the coils of serpents you’ll forget my face

as you find your life—and death—quicken.

But when you bleed, remember: on this same spindle

I pricked my finger so that when you fall

I might know where to stand, where to kindle

a fire for the century-long wait. You’ll sprawl

across my lap in a charmed sleep, still

bristling, dreaming of the freedom to scrape

your knees, to risk breakage, while the chill

bleaches your skin, your closed eyes, and I drape

my shawls around you. I could give you true

love’s kiss but I won’t be here forever.

I pray for one to take my place, to brew

you a cup of warming red date ginger

tea when you wake, to stroke your hair and murmur

those honeyed words that once upon a time

you craved. Because without a world to shelter

the strongest wings grow hollow and lose their shine,

and though you fly the taste of sky will sour.

There’s nothing wrong, you’ll see, with tradition,

with walking where generations have gone before,

where men and women were not in opposition

but helped each other function, that in the fray

of life they may yet weave an ardent throne

for their mirrored children, to see them stray, and stray,

until they wander, laughing and crying, back home.