

Arbitrary Nouns and Pronouns

Nine months of heart-racing anxiety
Of wondrous joy, worry, and panic
While cells multiplied and exploded
And grew from bean-like embryo, to fetus
To blurry black-and-grey sonogram images
And hasty gender exclamations.
Labeling a body too immature
To have a sense of self or identity.

Gendered wallpaper, gendered toys,
Gendered clothes and gendered names

Baby girl

Born with a penetrable hole, not a penis
Raised to be a girl because of my vagina.

Adoring daughter

Long hair, dresses, hair ribbons
Taught to be emotional, nurturing, feminine

Protective sister

And to hate myself for feeling so very not.

Life as a woman, the world's perception

Dutiful wife

Like living every day in a thick, tight costume

Weighed down with bags of cement

Loving mother

Which had the consistency of congealed blood.

Like the conquerable, thin lining of the womb

Strong woman

Which flushed from my betrayal of a body

And made the abject my sense of self.

Wise and caring grandmother

Playing roles I knew society wanted

Until the weight of the world left me broken.

Baby girl

Adoring daughter

Protective sister

Dutiful wife

Loving mother

Strong woman
Wise and caring grandmother
All strong, beautiful, wonderful words
But not words I want inscribed on my epithet.
Baby boy
Adoring son
Protective brother
Dutiful husband
Loving father
Strong man
Wise and caring grandfather
An issue of arbitrary nouns and pronouns
Words that are more than skin deep.

Ash Cook