

NURSERY

Left: Trace pictograph of an elk in the fine veins of your temple. Right: If it were a Virgin Mary we'd be on the news. Left: Try to sit you up for a burp, you're still latched on. Right: Milk drops leave shiny slug trails across your cheek. Left: Reading at the same time, my book on your hip, worried the officious prose style will come through in the milk, give you gas. Right: Doping for sleep. Left: Feeling like a mother didn't happen when you were born, or when I first fed you, or first used the word "daughter." It's happening six months later, in the dark, as a mosquito kazoos around and without a second's contemplation I pull up your covers, lay my bare arms on top of the blanket, whisper "bite me." Right: I wasn't talking to you. Left: Too tired to look at the clock, come under here, little bug. Right: Why is an elk worth nothing but a Virgin Mary on grilled cheese costs 28 000 dollars. Left: Hand straight up in the air like a flamenco dancer, articulate fingers. Right: *I've seen parents put their infants to bed right after eating, often because the baby falls asleep on the breast or bottle. I don't advise this for two reasons.* Left: Grinning kitten races off with the breast pad Frisbee. Right: *One, the baby becomes dependent on the bottle or breast, and soon needs it to fall asleep. Two, do you want to sleep after every meal?* Left: Actually, yes. Right: The tv flashes against your cheek, a small smooth screen. Left: Through the blinds moonlight strips stratify the bars of your crib. Right: From down here on the futon I watch your mobile. Left: The green bunny's coming around again. Right: Sun's coming up please don't notice. Left: You spit up to make room for more, like the Romans. Right: I wipe grains of sweat from your brow, as if you were a doctor delivering a baby. Left: October and the low afternoon sun glows through your jack-o'-lantern ears. Right: Richard's brought Chinese food, hot grease silhouettes on the paper bags, putputtering from your diaper, does he know it's you. Left: I wish I had a suit with feet. Right: puddin'. Left: Ruby jujube. Right: When was the last time I hummed and glugged simultaneously. Left: Not again. Right: From this angle the window that looks onto the pear trees instead looks up beyond them, incessant blue jays heading south, crossing the paler blue square of sky in groups of seven, five, nine, seven, five as if on a loop, going and going and we two are warm enough and staying. Left: I drink milk at the same time, am I an elaborate step that could be skipped. Right: Little lambs caper on the flannel blanket, twist

one up and clean out your earhole with it. Left: Before writing a poem about it I sometimes forgot, repeated sides. Right: Three years ago in Texas, Peruvian immigrants had their children taken away when the photo shop clerk developed their breastfeeding pictures and called the cops; a nipple in a baby's mouth was a second-degree felony: "sexual performance of a minor." Left: I close my eyes, these days only getting the kind of sleep you have on planes. Right: *Extracting oil from Alberta's tar sands requires three barrels of water for each barrel of oil produced.* Left: Heave you over my shoulder, pink terrycloth sack of cream. Right: Your "wrist" is a crease circling your fat arm like a too-tight string. Left: Still pitch before dawn and while you eat I dream a little, that you were born a gnome, and I loved you just the same, maybe more. Right: Dimples for knuckles. Left: Dark green eye keeps darting up at me, as if finally putting the face and the food together. Right: I wouldn't write this poem in Texas. Left: I never wanted to be one of those grown women with a teddy bear room. Right: *Passion is injurious to the mother's milk, and consequently to the child. Sudden joy and grief frequently disorder the infant's bowels, producing griping, looseness, &c.* Left: Now that you've started solids, applesauce in your eyebrows, I've become a course. Right: Spider on the plastic space mobile, walking the perimeter of the yellow crescent moon. Left: Dollop. Right: Now it's on Saturn's rings, if it fell off it would drop right into my mouth. Left: I take 2%, you take hindmilk. Right: Fingers shrimp their way through the afghan holes. Left: I have *hindmilk*. Right: We watch the show about you, the young and the restless, you keep smacking your lips off and craning your neck back to see what the devil Victor's on about now. Left: Beads of milk pop out before your mouth even gets there. Right: What if your donor turned out to be Eric Braeden, who plays the patriarch Victor Newman, what if you concluded every one of our disagreements with a curt and authoritative "End of discussion." Left: Heat gusts through the vent, stirs stars. Right: This little piggy had tofu wieners, this little piggy had none. Left: Ugh, plugged ducts. Right: How did the childless author of Tender Buttons know. Left: I can't move to change the station away from the man who keeps saying "as far as the weather" without adding "goes" or "is concerned." Right: You've got it made as far as milk. Left: Your lashes fall to your cheeks, the tiny nailclippers are within reach, and I plan the great triumph of my afternoon. Right: Kitten licks your head, leaves welts. Left: I could go for a fontanelle about now. Right: *He was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor.* Left: Lying down together, your foreshortened head huge, I remember your birth.

Right: The other side always lets down, twins the default setting. Left: You smile at a private joke, milk floods out the corners. Right: One for the road. Left: In the bathroom at the Woodstock service station a changing table and thank goodness a small metal chair, which I would never have noticed before you came, or if I did would have thought it an odd luxury, for doing up boots or taking a load off. Right: In a different house, you keep a watchful eye, dark magnetic Northern lake. Left: Feet curl in your shrunk sleeper, grandma says you'll get bunions. Right: You wet your suit, and mine, while drinking, like a functional doll I once had, her innards a single fine plastic tube. Left: The other grandma said you'll be bowl-legged if we stand you up too much. Right: Their hardcover *Oryx and Crake* is too heavy so I read a musty pamphlet my mother got when pregnant with me: *Girls will feel dowdy at this time, so wearing heels can give their spirits an extra boost*. Left: You latch on to my elbow and I'm surprised, as if I'd imagined you can see in the dark, forgetting you too are only human. Right: No longer eating, you keep lips latched, flutter your tongue, tender moth or creepy guy. Left: I thought she said "history in the *milking*." Right: It's easier to pinch the skin of older mothers. Left: I don't know Elmo let alone Baby Elmo. Right: Your nostrils are wheels on a tiny pink VW Beetle. Left: The doctor says you have thrush – I don't have my babycare guide but here's a *Peterson Field Guide* which says you should have a conspicuous eye-ring, a distinctly orange cast about the head, ghostlike spots, legs more dusky than your toes, your voice a melodic flutelike rolling from high to low to high, *whee-toolee-weee*, and you are presumed to winter in the hills of Hispaniola. Right: wing, whale, to-lifer, to-know, to-die. Left: wing, ward, overs, most, -ism. Right: stuff, side up, on, of way, of search, of asylum. Left: Bunny rattle nestled in the crook of your arm, your entire arm nestled in the crook of my hand. Right: Insert scenes of battle for more universal appeal. Left: You would win a nestling tournament. Right: No chair in the westbound service station, so we nurse in the bathroom stall, the diaper bag too heavy for the coat hook and it ticks and falters then smacks at my feet, you don't miss a swallow. Left: Here is the babycare guide which says I can catch thrush from you and could experience red, itchy, cracked and burning nipples and shooting pains while nursing. Finally, the kind of *mammaire verité* and deromanticization of motherhood the reader expected. Right: *See the way new trees flourish when they get started on a nurse log. Also called a mother stump, nurse logs are trees that have fallen and started to rot*. Left: Your Fisher-Price crib aquarium emits enough light to nurse by, enough surf sound to

imagine myself in a hammock under coconut palms, a crab on my nipple. Right: If we've already established that you're a star why would we wonder what you are. Left: Just when I was being a smart aleck about deromanticization, a sharp tooth. Right: I guess it's like, star, what are you, *really*. Left: Geese shouting hockey hockey hockey. Right: I thought I was supposed to be the one cheek pinching and chin chucking. Left: You talk with your mouth full and wear your hat to the table. Right: Snow. Last November I didn't see it, had the calendar turned to May, waiting for you to see your first everything. Left: Your first words emerging, you shout Hi! to my chest before latching on, Meow! when you're done. Right: Teddy Graham crumbs in my \$40 bra. Left: Unlike the cat, whose paws twitch while he dreams of chasing, you dream you are doing precisely what you are doing. Right: It's referred to as "letting down," although you feel the opposite. Left: handed, fielder, brain, Bank, atrioventricular valve. Right: minded, -ism, handed, ful, fielder, face, circular cone, brain, Bank, away, ascension. Left: Skim milk light through the curtain, it must have snowed in the night. Right: Cat eating plastic, just out of reach. Left: So these are "jugs." Right: *A good nurse is judicious, and obeys the medical man's orders to the very letter, while, on the other hand, a bad nurse acts on her own judgement, and is always quacking, interfering, and fussing with the breast. Such conceited, meddling nurses are to be studiously avoided; they often cause, from their meddling ways, the breasts to gather.* Left: Lift. Right: Tuft. Left: Loved. Right: Lift her. Left: Richter. Lift her wrote her wrought her daughter laughter lifter sitter safe her light left on her. Right: Snowbound and out of milk. I could express into my tea but I'm not making yoghurt. Left: On the other temple, veins outline a house, a single plume of smoke threading up into your hair, a bare tree in the front yard. Right: Dress you in a lamb suit in the hopes your babysitter will be tender with you. Left: One more nurse before I leave, Heidi still wearing earrings, a clean sweater, a game expression. Right: Ouch, there's the other tooth you cut this evening, kicking and clawing at Heidi with the labour of it, was the bottle of Amurula thanks enough, while we went to a party where adults conversed about who would win the federal election after the Gomery report and if you had to sleep with a man who would it be and we razed the hosts about their carefully worded invitation "we hope that you will be able to find a sitter and join us," Heidi at that moment bouncing the hollering lamb and trying to open applesauce with one hand, Johnny Depp won a majority, I know objectively speaking the cappuccino crème brûlée was delicious but I couldn't taste it for

missing you. Left: Home again late, you're fed at 2 a.m. without having to ask and you gurgle proudly as if I've finally caught on. Right: You thump your palm on my chest, then your own, you and me, I agree, difficult to distinguish. Left: Tethered to you, I must postpone killing that spider, forced to witness her labour, empathize with her line-by-line desires. Right: My left, your right. Left: *Patriarchal poetry left left left right left*. Right: Today I fed peaches to someone who's never heard of peaches. Ditto the moon, every Christmas carol, horse and the word horse. Left: I used to need two hands and a nursing pillow, now I can erase the hell out of two Sudokus, you outside the halo of the booklight. Right: 2 or a 6, 2 or a 6, 2 or a 6 or a 7. Left: This is expressive verse. Right: You pause to swish milk between your gums – a bit oaky this morning, a bit sassy, a bit maternal. Left: *Patriarchal poetry might be what is left*. Right: House Finch below the feeder, raspberry throat among a party of sparrows, you hang back embarrassed to be the only one who dressed up, I think you look good. Left: Check later to see if 'snorfle' is a word. Right: Tufted Titmouse, who is neither, nor is it all that tufty. Left: The closest thing was 'snorkel' which is kind of the opposite. Right: Emerging teeth like white stitches glowing in your gums. Left: In fact, you are more of a Tufted Titmouse than that bird was. Right: You kick through your snaps, hoist a foot into the icy dark. Left: I must have heard you crying, awakened, stood up, leant over the crib to ply the binky and the fuzzy sheep, sung Baby's Boat to no avail, given in, picked you up careful not to knock your head against the mobile, dug amongst your books for the mat to put on the futon, laid you down, unbuttoned my shirt, unhooked the nursing bra, found your mouth, because here we are but I don't remember the last 10 minutes on the road. Right: I can never rest now, knowing the teeth are there, like a gun in a play. Left: A noisy slurping emanates from our airport bathroom stall, *last call flight 142 to Calgary*, you pretend not to hear. Right: They suggested nursing for takeoff to save baby's tender ears, *that* you heard, and you milk it all the way across two Great Lakes. Left: The extravagantly indecisive route of the river through the prairie, ribbon candy. Right: Little cherub, clouds about your head. Left: Wishing that kid in front would put a sock in it. Right: Grandma K.'s house full of mirrors and you are jealous of all the other nursing babies. Left: The line along the elk's neck ruff extends down further than I had first noticed, leg bent elegantly above your ear. Right: A new place, and you are too excited to sleep. Left: Here three can fit in the king-sized bed and you keep shimmying down to make an H of us. Right: You are no longer

an infant, not yet a toddler, just a plain old baby. Left: Are you a tot. What is the age range of tots. Right: In the Mothers' Room at the Calgary zoo, your feet are the biggest, your burp the most robust, and I can see the other mothers doubt my claim that you are only six months old, think perhaps I have either lost my mind a little or stolen you. Left: You place your palm on my cheek and guide me away from the adult conversation, back to the appropriate downward, adoring gaze. Right: *If he be suckled after he be twelve months old, he is generally pale, flabby, unhealthy, and rickety; and the mother is usually nervous, emaciated and hysterical.* Left: You've got a hold on the right, like a chain smoker. Right: The days are shorter, the curtains heavier, and we seem always to be nursing in the dark, mistaking eyes for mouths, wrist bones for nipples. Left: Pet your felt head, to keep you awake and on task. Right: Lambie. Left: Eyeing my inflating belly, friends would ask, You're not going to start writing sentimental mothering poems are you. Right: The mirrors distract both of us, why did I think I could cut my own hair. Left: We park to eat lunch with a breathtaking Kananaskis view, you fascinated by the Mr. Lube sticker. Right: I'm no athlete but I could pitch for La Leche League. Left: All soft skin similes would have nowhere to go but right back to you. Right: Imprint of my sweatshirt zipper across your chin, Frankenstein's baby. Left: You thrash around in your sleeper until one leg flaps flat and the other is packed with knees. Right: The red numbers on the digital clock are huge, like in your birthing room or a train station. Left: At 3:51 I realize I could spell your name on a calculator. Right: The more you drink the more chance you'll wet Grandma's guest bed. Left: If the goods flow one way, why are we both "nursing." Right: You're not really hungry, just social drinking. Left: The prairie climate is dry and your nose clogs, you resent having to pause for jagged gasps of air like you're trying to win a swimming race. Right: Nursing you for the sixth time in as many hours, eyelids puffed between open and closed, I hear a butter knife scuff toast and clang in the marmalade jar and someone asking "are they *still* sleeping?" Left: You clutch your stuffed mouse, from whom you'd been separated by airport security, who checked it for bombs. Right: How to hide my breast without smothering you as the gay steward offers me mini pretzels. Left: They put us all in the parents' ghetto, across the aisle *two* babies with *one* mum. Right: Your smells make us embarrassed and sorry for the people around us until we hear the group ahead was visiting Ontario to hunt. Left: Home, and you are too excited to

sleep. Right: You pat my belly, the old stomping grounds. Left: The plastic moon glints in the light of the real moon. Right: Joy is so exhausting.