

LAMN IN BED
WITH YOU

EMMA BARNES

EMMA BARNES LAMB IN BED WITH YOU



AUCKLAND
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PRESS

For Simon George and my chosen family

Contents

This is a creation myth

This is a creation myth	3
Meat	5
Reading	6
Passive-aggressive letter to a john	7
Standing	8
Mother's Day	9
The Factory	10
I am a man	15
Maiden Mother Crone	17
Ohio	18
I am in bed with you	19
Landslide	23

Sigourney Weaver in your dreams

Sigourney Weaver and the Dream Father	27
Sigourney Weaver and I go to bed	28
Sigourney Weaver buys property in Aro Valley	29
Sigourney Weaver and I rent a movie	30
I take ecstasy with Sigourney Weaver	31
Sigourney Weaver and I come down	32
Sigourney Weaver and I go through Suicide Tuesday together	33
Sigourney Weaver helps me out of some feelings (not pants)	34
Sigourney Weaver and I renegotiate our boundaries	35
Sigourney Weaver and I play video games at Wizards	36
Sigourney Weaver seduces me with the purchase of a van	37
Sigourney Weaver gets citizenship and goes to a ceremony	38
Sigourney Weaver and the impregnation	39
Sigourney Weaver in the womb	40

I birth Sigourney Weaver's android baby	41
Sigourney Weaver confronts the limits of desire	42
Sigourney Weaver and I break up	43
Sigourney Weaver brushes my hair	44
Sigourney Weaver and I correspond only via email	45
Sigourney Weaver becomes the witch of the block	46

The Run-Around

Give up	49
The heel of your palm	50
The cap of my shoulder	51
Hot spit	52
The vermilion line	53
I invite myself inside	54
Low boughs	55
The butter knife	56
To be known	57
Completely dry riverbed	58
Begin again	59
Cut	60
Down	62
You are a horrible goose	63
Before you arrive	64
There is no good ending	65
This is a love poem	66
Emptied	67
Good girl, good girl	68

<i>Previously published works</i>	71
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	72

This is a creation myth

I am deliberate
and afraid
of nothing.

— Audre Lorde, 'New Year's Day'

This is a creation myth

The woman impregnated the man and his belly swelled full of tadpoles. They lay on collapsible sun chairs eating crackers out of boxes until the children arrived. The first one hurled hula hoops in front of it, rolling and tumbling through them while breathing fire. The second child, as always, had a lot to live up to. That child balanced books on its head and juggled water balloons. Though this feat was equally challenging, the audience felt it was only a four out of five compared to the previous entertainer.

When the third child made its way out of its father's belly, it was just a tadpole. You can't always be what you want to be even if your mother and father are Makers. Or children of Makers. Or even if – well, you get the picture. The man wanted to spew the tadpoles from his mouth in a wave of wiggling water, but the woman said that her people had produced a steady stream of one child after one child after one child for centuries and would it be okay if he just did that because it was what she was used to and she would

feel more comfortable with the whole procreation process if she had a foot in the door in terms of the method of dispersal. For a while there were just children. A belly can hold quite a few. Probably about an hour later a child came out that transformed into a cockerel with a red comb and then into a cat and then into the words 'No comment' written in curls of parmesan cheese on blue cut-pile carpet made of 100% pure New Zealand wool. The audience clapped more from confusion than any other sentiment.

The next four children created a planet through a series of interpretive dances and prodigious vomits. The one who vomited the magma probably had the hardest row to hoe. Although the one who puked up tiny bamboo tree after tiny bamboo tree might have had a strong argument had it not been puking for what was a remarkably long time. That child was understandably tired and sore and not really in the mood for a good debate on the 'who had it worse' front. I think we can all agree that vomiting bamboo

or magma wasn't really high on our list of priorities when we woke this morning. The next child presented herbs and such, in an arrangement reminiscent of a bouquet garni but on a more melodramatic scale. No one really knew what to do about this since it didn't seem related to the tasks at hand. 'So, it has come to this,' said the man with a belly slightly less full of tadpoles than it had been at a previous moment in time. The woman leaned forwards and sniffed deeply. Her flaring nostrils lent a certain *je ne sais pour*

quoi to the whole situation. In the middle there was a pause where the earlier children fought with the later children over trivialities. Some spit flew and the man and the woman opened a new box of crackers and discussed the scene. The oldest child split itself open and revealed itself again and again as companies of smaller selves. The youngest shook head to toe spraying children like drops of water over the ranks. Several other children chopped themselves into pieces each one a new tiny tadpole. The yard crowded with bodies.

By the time it grew dark there were too many children to count. They were a huddled mass of fishy tails and acrobatic tricks. Arms shot skyward searching for space and everyone took breath in concert. There were small fights. Several children sustained bites. The man and the woman got up from their sun chairs and took a bow in front of the gathered brood and disappeared in a puff of smoke. This was much like everyone expected. The children picked up their tricks and set off for grandma's.

Meat

I know many women who are growing embryos. I had hoped it was done in mason jars with water by now. But I have been informed that it's still much meatier than that. My mason jar was ready to go. I had a jug of water even. But you know what kids are like these days. I question the wisdom of the process but, of course, most advice is fairly straightforward. In most cases the meat complies freely, maybe you could even say eagerly. I'm not sure I could ask for said meat to do much more than exist. But then, meat just seems to do its thing, with or without my higher meaty functions. The growth of the next generation of meat people seems tenuous when you consider the lumbering vulnerability of a pregnant person, their meat encasing newer meat. The smaller meat person suspended in juices that require the meat incubator to keep on keeping on. It was the expulsion of small meat products that killed pregnant people either in the act or later from wear and tear that leads to meaty decline. Rotting. It is difficult to say meat over and over in the context of humanity. We don't like to consider ourselves chewed up, swallowed and defecated by some higher-rung occupant. It is hard to imagine what is above your meat when the meat focuses as if at an apex. As if at the apex with an unwillingness to remember that our meat is fragile, our bones flimsy, and something else, inevitably, has bigger teeth.

Reading

I learned to read the weather at his knee, at his beck and call. I look into a face to see the headland, the forming clouds. I will call it a storm five days in advance. I interpret the signs inside the signs before the signs are signs. Boxers telegraph their next move. I saw yours last week. I'm waiting for it to arrive. When the punches land I am waiting for the next round. I don't bother to pick up what you're putting down. I live in the future then the past. You are always in the middle speaking to me through layers that are me seeing what I expected to see then looking for the next trick. I don't know how anything makes it inside me. Which may explain why nothing makes it inside me. I hollowed myself out to make room for everything he wanted me to be. And I've filled the space ever since with worry, with the little nightmares that seep into the daytime and with faces. All your faces. They roll up through me, a yearbook of bad decisions. Of missed connections. Of reconsidered invitations. I am outside of time. I am inside myself. I'm never going to hear what you're saying to me.