The Emperor’s Cut

Rose Postma

When I see my life as it should be, Sunday afternoon’s vegetables are peeled and sliced, waiting under water in glass bowls on the kitchen counter. There are no early morning trips to the ER because there is lunch to be made. I had wanted to struggle with this baby, sacrifice my body on an altar of pain, let death or at least its foretaste run rip shod through my veins because you are never closer to death than when facilitating life. But when his, my, our placenta starts to separate from the uterine wall, I am strapped to a sterile pyre and pushed into a numb river. Even Caesar’s birth (contrary to legend) was not mediated by a surgeon, with thin latex gloves pressing on unresponsive flesh. His mother was allowed to suffer and surrender in an empire where a baby could be cut from a dead mother’s body so as to avoid burying a pregnant woman. I am unfeeling as the scalpel unzips my skin right above the pubic bone, separating muscle, organ, tissue. I have to be told to gasp when he is plucked, twisted from me—a small, unripe plum.