



Mika Yamamoto
One Summer, Another Hot Summer

She expected blood, but there was no blood. Later, she would always start the story this way: “You expect blood,” she’d say, “but there is no blood. There is a baby, small, but whole.”

A baby, small, but whole.
Pale but solid.
Real, but dead.
This is no way to start a story.
Start over.

* * *

She wanted to pee. She went to the bathroom to release the pressure. She sat on the seat. She felt something pass and began to scream. She looked in the toilet, expecting blood, but there was no blood. There was just a baby, pale, but whole.

Here we are again.
That morning the ultrasound was silent—the baby still there.
“We’ll induce to avoid a D&C. When labor starts meet me at the hospital,” the doctor said.
“Don’t send me home,” Eri said.

“Please,” Abbott said, “admit her.”

“There’s no medical reason to,” the doctor said.

They gave her a suppository to induce. They sent her home to wait.

Six hours later, Eri went to the bathroom to pee. There was no pee; there was no blood. This is how it happens at fourteen weeks. It wasn’t technically a baby, just a fetus, but it wasn’t just a clot of blood either. Nose, bones, and toes—all there.

* * *

“For women, the bleeding is healing,” her mother had said. It was an odd thing to say. It reminded Eri of her landlord, whom she had cared for after surgery, years ago, because his wife wouldn’t, and Eri was a nurse. Every day, he counted the drops of blood he squeezed from his wound. He associated blood with bad, blood with sick, blood with death. Each drop validated his fear.

“You need the blood to heal,” she’d said as she cleaned the wound on his abdomen. Outside, the jasmine bloomed in the dark. “You bleed because you are alive,” she added. Still he counted the drops. Twelve drops. Five drops. Drop. Drop.

“He’s such a fusspot,” Eri said to Abbott on the phone at night. They were only dating back then, long distance. They talked each night, when minutes became free, at nine o’ one.

“He’s seventy years old and had major surgery. He’s allowed to be afraid,” Abbott said.

But Eri was a nurse. She measured her compassion out in teaspoons. “Please,” she snorted, “he’s fine.”

* * *

Abbott. Abbott ran up the stairs when he heard Eri screaming. He came, found Eri sitting on the floor, trying to push herself into the wall, on the opposite end from the toilet. He knew when he saw her where Baby was. He did not say, “It’s okay,” even though his instinct was to say so. He did not say, “It’s okay,” because it was not okay, and saying it would not make it so. Then he looked into the toilet. A sob escaped his throat.

Eri heard the sob and thought, *I will never un-hear that sound*. Even as she thought it, she felt foolish to think it. *Don’t overstate*, she berated herself. She couldn’t help it, though. She thought what she thought. She, herself, was keening as she watched Abbott trying to fish the baby out with a net. A fish net, meant for a goldfish. The goldfish was long dead too. She didn’t hear the sounds she was making because she was thinking

of the sound Abbott had made. *I will never un-hear it, never*, she thought to herself over and over.

The net was useless. Abbott scooped the baby out of the water with his hand. He held the baby in his palm, before he dropped it into a bag. *My child, my child*, he thought.

* * *

“For women, the bleeding is healing,” her mother said when Eri called her from the hospital. She should know. She’d lost three herself. “How long are they keeping you?”

“I’m just waiting to sign the paperwork,” Eri told her, “to give instructions about the remains.”

“Could they tell what...?” her mother asked.

“Yes,” Emi said. “A boy.”

* * *

They had expected a heartbeat, but there had been no heartbeat. They saw a baby, but heard no heartbeat. The baby was small but whole—it was clear—even in the murky ultrasound. Yet they heard no heartbeat but their own, *Boom, boom, boom*. Through throats, ears, bones. *Boom, boom, boom*. The doctor wanted the ultrasound repeated on a stronger machine, in a different building, on the other side of campus. Walk there. The sun was shining. It was June. Eri said nothing. Abbott said nothing. One step, two step, three step, four.

Hooked up again to a machine, Eri said nothing.

Abbott said nothing.

The tech said nothing.

Waiting was deafening.

Silence expanded time.

* * *

“We’ll induce,” the doctor ordered.

“Don’t...” warned Eri.

“Please,” begged Abbott.

* * *

Abbott had scooped the baby out of the water with his hand. He held the baby in his palm before dropping it into a bag. Then he dialed the doctor’s number.

“Bring her in now,” the doctor said, “and bring the fetus too.”

* * *

Eri lay on the bed as they cleaned her uterus. Rid her of placenta with sterile tongs and spoons. At least, that’s how she pictured it. Streaks of red on metal.

“Does it hurt?” Abbott asked, seeing Eri cry.

“No,” Eri said. Abbott squeezed her hand.

* * *

When the doctor was finished, she gave instructions:

Don’t worry if you faint from loss of blood.

Refrain from sex for two weeks to prevent infection.

Wait for at least one period between one pregnancy and another.

They cleaned her uterus, took their child, gave instructions, let her go.

* * *

“Ice cream?” Abbott asked as he started the car. He was lactose intolerant.

Eri shook her head no. Then, she changed her mind.

“Okay,” she said. “Rum raisin.”

He knew she would not eat the ice cream, but had only said yes for his sake. So they went to the Purple Porch to not eat ice cream, and then went home to not sleep.

Early the next morning, before it was light, Eri got up to go to the bathroom.

“Abbott!” she called. Then, fainted.

Abbott ran in and found her on the white floor.

* * *

Four weeks passed and Eri lay naked on the bed, hot. The window was open, but to let in what breeze? No breeze this evening and their air conditioner broken.

She rubbed her palms over her stomach. It was stretched out. What used to be a smooth, hard bump was jiggly. It still felt strange. She had bled and stopped bleeding by now. But still, no period. She thought of a Catherine Wing poem:

*One day done for
bracketed by two long
nights and dark*

The bedside lamp was on, and she lay in the pool of light. The skin on her stomach was dull, with opalescent streaks that glowed. Abbott, naked too, lay on his side watching her. She took his hand to put it on her belly. He ran his hand over it. Even stretched out, her abdomen was not much bigger than his hand. He rested his head on her left shoulder. Closed his eyes.

“What are you thinking?” Eri asked.

“I was thinking about your apartment on Lawler Street,” Abbott said, with eyes still closed.

It was the apartment she had lived in when they met—the basement unit below her landlord. No air conditioning in that apartment either, and they had started seeing each other in June.

“That was ten years ago,” Eri said.

They used to lie on the bed like this that summer too. Naked, always naked—or about to be. A summer fling, they had called it then. “No, *you* called it that,” Abbott always corrected her. Abbott used to pick her up in his ’83 Oldsmobile Regency at the end of her shift at the hospital. The car sometimes stalled but had a twelve-CD changer. A sultry summer spent with a hot, young guy—no potential for a future—but fun. Why not?

* * *

“No potential, huh?” Abbott chided her now.

These words, which she’d eventually used to end things with him, to try to end things, came back to bite her time and time again. Their wedding night, for one. The day they found out she was pregnant, another.

“Well...” Eri pointed to her flabby belly. A silver lining to the suffering. At least she could win this challenge, this one time.

“Oh no,” Abbott said, as he slid his hand past her waist and rested his hand on the small of her back. He felt her spine arch slightly. “I don’t think so.”

Still on his side, he pulled her closer. She turned her head towards him, exposing her neck—an invitation. He grazed it with his lips—hardly more than a whisper. He knew her eyes were closed now without looking up. This woman, his love, his wife. He breathed her in, her scent that had not changed in all these years—no perfume—just soap, shampoo, and vinegar.

Eri's left hand ran down his back, the back so much thicker now than it was that first summer. Abbott was stronger, more substantial. This back could carry her if she needed it to—this back—a strong back—a husband's back. She ran her hands up his back, and promised to always have it.

Abbott ran his finger around the swell of her breast. "Is it sore?" he asked.

"No, nothing is sore," she said, and brought his mouth to her. He ran his tongue tentatively around her nipple at first. Aroused by its hardening, he began to suck. She moaned, and he wanted to taste that sound—brought his mouth to hers, searched it with his tongue, and met her tongue searching for him. In her mouth all he tasted was desire.

Hot and wet she was—all lover.

"Taste me," she begged, so he did. He tasted her ears, her shoulders, her fingers. He tasted her stretchmarks, every one of them, one for every week of their baby's life...he thought, but he knew he was wrong. He tasted the space where the baby had lived, he kissed it now; *Goodbye, hello*, he thought. He went lower, to go deeper, to find her and himself.

* * *

She felt him all over. His mouth on her ears, her shoulder, her fingers, her stretchmarks. Her stretchmarks. With her hands she felt his hair, twisting her fingers through them as he went lower, willing him to hurry: go lower, go deeper.

* * *

He knew not to hurry. Ten years is enough time to know how much time. As he got closer to where she wanted him to be, he went up to kiss her again. It gave her a chance to feel his yearning, and nothing begets fervor like fervor. Hard makes wet, he knew.

She stroked him faster and harder, up and down, until he could stand it no longer. Ready to rupture, he went down—no delay. His tongue found her wetness engorged with desire. She was loud. He loved that she was loud.

Now she wanted to taste him—to have him in her mouth. She wanted to make him more if that were possible. He lay on his back. She leaned over him. Her tongue touched just the tip at first. Then with her saliva she made it wet. She moved it in and out. Slowly, slowly, in and out. More. Then more. And faster.

He groaned, and she knew when enough was enough. She climbed onto him, and he found his way into her, deeper and deeper, making her

cry out. More, more, further, deeper, fuller, more, more, and more and more...flames and flowers, flowers and flames.

* * *

Early the next morning, before it was light, Eri got up to go to the bathroom.

“Abbott!” she called.

Abbott ran in, heart pounding.

But Eri was smiling. In her hand, toilet paper—smeared with menses.

A small wholeness leapt into Abbott. Unexpectedly solid, yet fluid.

Mika Yamamoto's work has been previously published in numerous journals, including Diverse Arts Project, Foliate Oak, Fourth River, Knee Jerk, Nimrod International Journal, Bluestem, Noon, and Whiskey Island. Yamamoto received her MA in creative writing from Central Michigan University, where she was introduced to the world of experimental fiction. She is a certified hypnotist who swears she has never used her hypnotic skills while working as a first-grade teacher, an E.R. technician, or even as a Starbucks barista. Yamamoto is currently a writer for ESME.com, an online resource for single mothers.