

The hardest skill – I find – is to recall  
just enough to slake a question I predict  
while auscultating fetal hearts at dawn:

“So, how was childbirth for you?”

My feet tread the same floors where you were born  
four years ago today in a blood slick.  
The hardest skill – I find – is to recall.

Their friendly question’s valued, but ignored,  
instead discussing patterned baby kicks  
while auscultating fetal hearts at dawn.

My now-annual zoetrope jaunts  
memories of cords, drugs drawn, needle bricks,  
    lines, scribes, packets torn, algorithm scripts,  
        bimanual uterine massage tricks,  
            marinated towels, transfusion, constrict,  
                apologies fraudulent and authentic,

“Please, will you look up at me?”

The hardest skill – I find – is to recall  
our near miss. Drapes on wards aren’t soundproof walls  
and beats crescendo as fob watch ticks  
while auscultating fetal hearts at dawn.

Their fundus tightens. They breathe deep, withdraw.  
Supporting and needing support conflict.  
The hardest skill – I find – is to recall  
while auscultating fetal hearts at dawn  
on your birthday: now you’re four.

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#### **About Ash Bainbridge**

Ash Bainbridge is a queer poet, student midwife, and relationship anarchist. Their work elevates these identities via physiological roots. “Why Are My Periods Heavy? (Adenomyosis)” is forthcoming with Spoonie Press (27/07/22). Open mic praise includes, “Bloody hell, spot on,” Jonny Fluffypunk; “Sparky spoken word. Definitely one to watch,” Emma Purshouse.