

You Had Me at Goodbye

17th March 2022

Dear baby,

Hello. Is that a good word to start with? They say hello is sometimes the moment when you “have” a person, but I’m not sure about that. I can say hello to you, and I can introduce myself to you. I can say, “Hello baby, I’m your mummy.” But it won’t change the fact that I don’t have you. I cannot hold you. I don’t know what that feels like.

Maybe a better place to start is: happy birthday. Yes, happy birthday baby! Today is the day you were due in the world. There is something wonderful about St Patrick’s Day as your birthday. It makes me smile because I know you would have been mischievous and magical, just like a leprechaun. Maybe this is like the folktale? Maybe I’m the human that captured you? Maybe I set you free and you might grant me three wishes in return? But maybe that’s too much to ask of you. I really have no right given what I’ve done.

Today I write you this letter but instead I wish I could have made you a birthday cake. I wonder what you would have liked. All these cake thoughts go around in me like a carousel. A funfetti cake bursting with rainbow sprinkles? An angel food cake, lighter than a cloud? A dark and delicious devil’s food cake? They do say children love chocolate. But I don’t have that photo of you with cocoa smudges around your little mouth. I do have a picture of you though, inside my mind. You had wild curls with all of autumn’s colours and a round face with a sweetie button nose. I have always been someone who is so alive to flaws, mostly my own. But you were perfect.

I wish we could have had a home. A calm little cottage. A kitchen table dressed in checked red and white cloth. A milk frother to make babyccinos. An armchair to snugly fit one big and one small body. A book corner. Perhaps you would have loved cookbooks, or even ghost

stories. Sometimes I feel so sad about letting you go; the feeling blows through me like a wild wind through a haunted house. But isn't that what grief is – love that just haunts you.

When I found out you were coming, I had this feeling I have never had before. A gentle floating, in air so pure it was like angels were breathing softly. I felt full, like I would never hunger again. And so grateful. But that was the feeling that scared me the most. You can't be grateful unless you want something. Or someone. It was then I knew I wanted you. I said hello to you. I should have said it louder. I wish I had used my voice to say how much I wanted to keep you.

The last day that I had you never leaves me. I remember walking up the stairwell at the clinic, the echoes of the grey cold, concrete steps. The wind was gentle but it didn't whisper; it sounded like it was wailing, like it was trying to tell me: go back. Turn around. Don't do it. Don't listen to him, it's not about what he wants.

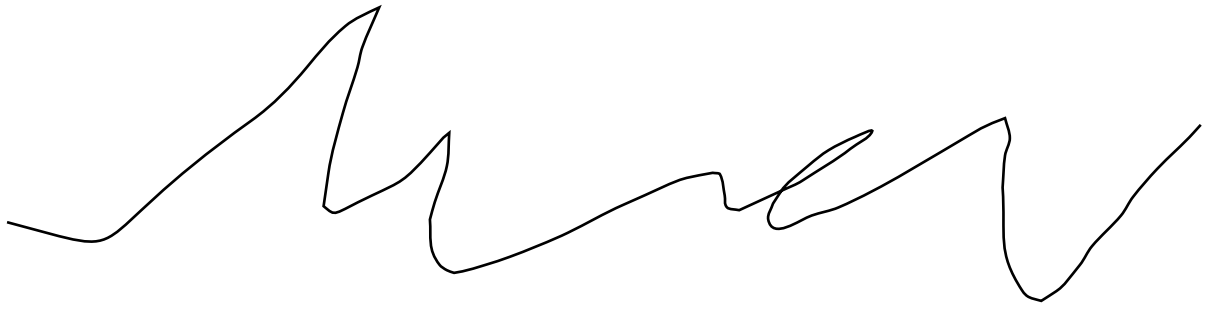
Then, after, it was just an ordinary day where the old earth kept turning and new life happened. People went about their busy business. Cars drove up and down the roads. People stopped for their afternoon lattes. I left home with you and came back without you. But I still came back still loving you.

You had your little home inside me and I made you homeless. That night, the punching cramps felt like you were using your tiny fists to say, hello, I'm here. Like you were fighting for your life. I am so sorry I never did that for you. I made the wrong choice.

Maybe that's what grief is – a hungry but homeless love.

I can't believe I was nearly your mum. Me, your mummy. Can I say that? Is that allowed? I'm just trying to say how I feel. For once.

No, please ignore all of the above. I have got this letter so wrong. I am going to cross out everything and start again.



17th March 2022

Dear baby,

I wish I hadn't said hello to you.

Because then I wouldn't have had to say goodbye.

I wish I had you.

Love,

Mummy