

# THROUGH

Rachel Barenblat

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For everyone who helped me through  
and anyone in need.

## CONTENTS

Longing	5
Knowledge	6
Moving	7
Box	8
Twilight	9
Community	10
Threshold	11
Wordless melody	12
One day I forget	13
Request	14
Author's note	15
About the author	16

## LONGING

You are two blue lines  
forming a cross

the unknowable, dancing  
on the head of a pin

potential coiled, poised  
to change everything.

I am reeling as if tipsy  
awestruck and unglued.

This must be how God feels  
holding all of us

with quiet compassion  
in creation's womb.

## KNOWLEDGE

I knew  
but I didn't want to know  
turned away from knowing

I put myself to bed

such uneasy sleep  
and when I woke  
blood everywhere

in the hotel bathroom's  
harsh light

## MOVING

Avant-garde film  
the camera shaky  
the lens blurred

the hallway telescopes  
no soundtrack, dead silence  
I'll never make it through

I walk a balance beam  
(how many steps  
before I relearn my stride?)

the kaleidoscope tips  
and all the jagged pieces  
rearrange

help me rewind  
blood everywhere  
I wasn't expecting

## BOX

Imagine a box  
green and lacquered  
painted with gold  
polished hasps

I will write my hopes  
unfulfilled  
on index cards  
and tuck them inside

or burn them  
at havdalah  
that separation between  
holy and profane

a friend clasps  
my hand, reminds me  
*you were a mother*  
*honor that*

and everything  
I've been picturing  
crumbles to ash  
and blows away

## TWILIGHT

Shabbat's "third meal"  
thick windows showing  
headlights outside  
and the pinkening sky

we pass grape juice  
around the room, share  
challah torn by hand  
singing without words

the tradition prescribes  
psalm twenty-three  
at this hour on this day

taste of heaven  
departing inexorably  
as the moments tick by  
the sun goes down

I press my lips together  
and shake in my chair  
and hands reach out  
and I close my eyes

## COMMUNITY

One by one  
every woman I know  
approaches me  
carrying words

it happened to me  
my mother  
my sister  
my best friend

four times in a row  
before the baby came  
once, before  
I even knew

three times  
over six years  
and then children  
healthy and perfect

just keep breathing  
in and out  
around the stone  
you've swallowed

I've been there  
I am holding you  
you won't feel this way  
always

## THRESHOLD

After a week  
something shifts.

No longer thinking  
“on Friday I was still...”

We return to the life  
we already know

and love, evenings  
by the fire again.

Wine and coffee  
and raw yellowtail

and if I stay up too late  
reading about wolves

no one chides me.  
We set aside plans

for converting a room  
reshaping our days.

I remember how  
to resent my curves.

It comes to seem  
like a dream, impossible

that we ever hovered  
on this threshold

or imagined ourselves  
ready to go through.

## WORDLESS MELODY

The niggun asks  
why does a soul incarnate

in this world  
with all its sorrows?

The first line asks  
and the second answers

though without lyrics  
each of us must interpret:

is it to know God,  
to be known in turn...?

There is no song  
which asks why a soul

dips a toe in these waters  
and then turns back

leaving a woman  
bereft, bleeding.

## ONE DAY I FORGET

It's a morning like any other  
*modah ani* in the shower  
cup of tea on my desk  
and I'm two hours in  
before I remember.

Or a friend asks  
*can I hand him to you*  
*for a second?* and  
the baby fits on my shoulder  
and no one cries.

My hands aren't empty  
but reaching out  
for paper and pen  
for a hammer, a spoon  
to taste the world.

Anything is possible  
even someday  
climbing again  
aboard this rickety ship  
over these deep, cold waters.

## REQUEST

Source of all that is  
source of mercy  
planter of seeds  
in rocky soil

You whose names  
are womb  
and breast  
and giver of milk

protect every one  
who aims imperfectly  
to emulate  
your loving care

guard everyone  
who opens her body  
and prays  
for possibility

grant us compassion  
when our bodies fail us  
and help us try  
again, and again

remind us  
that deep down  
something new waits  
always to grow.

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

Various sources suggest that one in five, one in four, or one in three pregnancies ends in miscarriage. Most women don't talk about it, so no one ever knows.

No one who goes through this is alone. Other women have been there, too. Other women are there right now.

May everyone who grieves be comforted.

Rachel Barenblat, January 2009

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rachel Barenblat is author of three poetry chapbooks: *the skies here* (Pecan Grove Press, 1995), *What Stays* (Bennington Writing Seminars Alumni Chapbook Series, 2002) and a collection of hospital chaplaincy poems entitled *chaplainbook* (Laupe House Press, 2006.) She holds an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars, is a student in the ALEPH rabbinic program, and has been blogging as the Velveteen Rabbi since 2003. She lives with husband Ethan Zuckerman in Lanesboro, MA.

## **ABOUT THIS COLLECTION**

In addition to this electronic edition, *Through* is printed in a hand-bound limited edition of 20 handmade copies, which are not for sale.

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