

# A Death in the Village

by Jennifer Neczypor

Written in memory of Hawa Bockarie

A year ago, a Party.

All laughter and sunshine and cold ginger beer  
Onyx plaits with bright colored beads at the end  
A three-layered cake, frosting and fourteen sparkling candles  
Burning oh-so-so briefly atop melting roses.

She never dreamed beyond busy school days,  
Final exams and sun-drenched afternoons, studying with friends.

Ten months ago, a Wedding.

A thirty-year-old groom, dark eyes shiny with shy desperation  
Her father said yes; her mother said nothing  
But six starving mouths thanked her, glad to taste meat again  
And the night's sweaty thrusting, thoroughly unexpected, was mercifully brief.

She never dreamed beyond the dancing,  
Booming music and a flouncy gown, pinned up, too big.

Five months ago, a Fluttering.

Rolling and tapping and strong-strong kicks  
Anticipation punctuating the boiling of rice  
And the bartering for onions and the endless washing  
A secret swelling deep inside, a roiling ocean of potential.

She never dreamed beyond tiny fingers and plump cheeks,  
Sleepy smiles and the pleasant tingling of swollen breasts.

One month ago, a Pain.

Crushing headaches, hazy sight, puffy face  
The doctor, his omniscience barring science  
Drowned her concerns and sent her home  
A ten-kilometer trek through bush and swamp.

She never dreamed beyond the sweltering labor room,  
Her husband's praise and the midwife's gnarled, knowing hands.

Yesterday, a Dripping.

Became a gushing, soaked lapa between trembling legs  
Hot wetness jarring her from slumber  
The neighbor's panicked cry for help, too late, too slow  
A piercing stab down low, the drip-drip-drip of pulsing red.

Then darkness, velvet-soft and creeping.  
Welcoming.

She never dreamed.

Today, a Burial.

Behind the schoolyard where she once ran free  
Hushed prayers, hope interred inarticulate  
The air thick with wordless guilt  
Silence shattered by incriminating mewls.

Her lashes fluttering in bereft innocence,  
A baby half-awakes, aside, alone,  
No longer  
Dreaming.

*Jennifer Neczypor is a certified nurse-midwife and family nurse practitioner from California, USA, currently working as a midwife educator for Seed Global Health in Makeni, Sierra Leone. In the past, she has served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Vanuatu, and has also worked as a midwife in Boston, MA, as well as in international settings including Nepal and Uganda. She is passionate about global health and women's rights, and believes that it is a midwife's job to empower women and girls by providing compassionate, quality sexual and reproductive health care throughout the lifespan. Jennifer enjoys writing, and feels it is important that more women's health providers use poetry and stories to share the struggles, triumphs, and journeys of the patients they are privileged to serve. She wrote this poem in honor of all mothers lost in childbirth in Sierra Leone, particularly the youngest ones.*