

DEBORAH BACHARACH

FIRE, APHASIA, AND THE SPIRIT WORLD

I had a routine before starting to write. First, I'd read a couple pages of a mystery, or more than a couple. I'd check email, play some solitaire, and finally if I had fifteen minutes left before bedtime, I'd start counting syllables and considering line breaks.

Then I had a baby.

The first few weeks after Rose was born I would sit staked to the breastfeeding chair and feel a current through my limbs, vibrating deep inside. One night it felt like "I must have it. Take me now." Except it wasn't sex I wanted; it was writing. I've been calling myself a writer for fifteen years, I went to graduate school, I teach writing, and I never found this passion. I have no time for solitaire, very little time for the bathroom, but somehow, I have to write.

I feel like a faucet desperate to open. I'm the blue metal one outside. The handle sticks, and it's hard to get going, but you know when you're pressing at it, water is waiting to burst out. It's the water for the garden. It's not delicate. It doesn't have to be drawn up. It's power. It explodes out at the first opportunity.

I write when she's pulling the papers out of my to-do pile and putting them in the recycling bin. When she's fallen asleep in her stroller and she'd wake if I transferred her to the car, I sit on the cement curb of the parking lot, cars pulling in beside me, and write. When she's fallen asleep on the way home from shopping, I sit cramped in the front seat of the car, my notebook propped on the steering wheel and write. When she's asleep on my lap, and I can't reach the computer or a pen, I turn on the tiny tape recorder and whisper what I want to write. I step over her sleeping body to get to my computer and write. I write when I should be asleep. I write as though my life depended on it. Sometimes I think her life depends on it.

As I release her from the stroller because she is screaming, exhausted, refusing to sleep unless strapped to my chest, I feel my jaw clench. Clench like

