



# FLOWERS FALL

By Bethany Saltman

## A Woman's Life

Yet, though it is like this, simply, flowers fall amid our longing,  
and weeds spring up amid our antipathy.

— Dogen Zenji, *Genjokoan*

This past weekend a small group of moms gathered in my living room to celebrate another mom who is about to have Baby #2. Up in these parts, a Native American-inspired “blessingway” is often offered as a more meaningful alternative to the onesie-fests new moms often receive. Not that clothes and other gifts aren’t awesome, and freely given when someone has a baby—they certainly are, as well as a ton of home-cooked meals—but a blessingway is a quieter way for women to be together, offer their love and support to the woman about to give birth, and do groovy things like introduce ourselves as daughter of so-and-so, and mother of so-and-so, calling together the generations of mothers who came before us.

This was my first blessingway, and I was nervous to be hosting it, a little uncomfortable with the potential flake-factor, to be honest. But I was excited to check it out, and—better yet—in the comfort of my own home. Turns out, I was really moved by the whole thing. One of the coolest parts was when we all gave our pregnant friend the bead we had chosen for her to string together into a necklace, infused with the strength of her female friends. We went around the room and described why we chose *this* bead for *this* woman, which led, as it should, to passionate odes to the mom-to-be, reminding her that she has what it takes to push the baby out.

I have always had close girlfriends and I’ve never been shy to depend upon them. But when I had my baby, I was the first of my friends to take the plunge. Of course I got loads of love from all of them, (not to mention plenty of *holy s\*\*\*t, look at your belly!!!!*) They just weren’t in a position to inspire confidence in me as a birthing creature. And neither was I.

Looking back at the difficulty that I did, in fact, have giving birth, I can see now that at least part of the problem was the medicalization of the birthing process; from being induced, to the epidural, to the discovery that I was allergic to pretty much every drug they gave me, to the c-section, to the infected wound, it was one intervention after another. So, that was a real drag. It is important to say, though, that I don’t really feel like a victim because I never, *ever* wanted a home birth, a drug-free birth, or any other kind of birth that involved feeling the pain more than absolutely necessary. I chose that medical model. I am pretty tough in lots of ways. My idea of a good time is sitting still, for days and days, through every possible state of body and mind. I can tell a teenager behind a cash register to get off his phone and focus. Fearless! But when it came to having a baby, I was terrified of the pain, and ready to give it up for the doctors. I had no interest in practicing that part of being a woman.

My point here is not about birth plans, per se. When it comes to such a personal terrain, to each her own, I say. But what I am looking at is shedding light

on the choices I make and the limits I set for myself because, in the end, what else is there? For instance, now I can see how growing up in a house ruled by various manifestations of male power—from the bread-winning (and losing) dad, to the older brothers who controlled the remote, me, and everything in between, to the violence, the threats of violence, the distance, and the fear of distance, to the thwarted mom—made me incredibly ambivalent about being a girl in the world, wanting and loathing power at the same time. I think one of the reasons Zen really hooked me was because it *is* so macho, so boy-ish, so patriarchal, and yet the whole hard-core goal was to sit, cross-legged, on the floor, in silence, and to feel your body, free your mind, and tenderize your heart. A ridiculous contradiction, but perfect for the tension I grew up feeling. I am glad my polarizing reactivity led me to Zen, but it has closed the door on some other things that could have actually taught me or helped me grow, or even heal from the wounds that have given me so much fight in the first place.

In other words, as much as I love being a woman, as I get older, I see how much I hate it, too. A deep and primal resistance to doing the things women often do. Like have babies. Get soft (er) around the middle. Be moms.

As everyone has most certainly noticed, spring is here. My yard is coming alive—yellow first. The pinks and reds and oranges on their way. As I sniff around my tiny garden, I keep thinking about how two of the women at the blessingway brought beads for our friend that symbolized rebirth. They talked about how becoming a mother is like the shedding of an old life and the opening of a new one. I know what they mean. I look at the daffodils, opening themselves so completely, without a single thought or fear, and I know they were there last year, too, but they are not the same beings. Rebirth is not a repetition. I see Azalea in her footed pajamas, climbing up to sit on the kitchen counter, then crossing her legs, pursing her lips a little bit, then saying, in answer to a question I posed, “hmmm.....that’s a tricky one.” Absolutely nothing is the same.

I am changing all the time, too. I look in the mirror—ah, the same, only different. I go about my business, taking care of the things within my reach. And trying to stretch my reach, a tiny bit, all the time, as I can.

And even though I will probably not be pushing any more babies out, there are still plenty of opportunities to settle into that pure, raw state of transformation. More and more, I can see that I have everything I need. There isn’t much I have to do, or change, or fix. Just relax. Relax into the whole thing: my beautiful daughter, my hard work, the woods, my marriage, the sky, practice. This feminine body. This woman’s life. ●