

JULIE PREIS

CENTER OF ATTENTION

At first it is enough simply to be
 a squirming bundle in the crib, to feel
 the out-of-focus world assume the shape
 of comfort in the daily lifting up
 and laying down, the warm surprise of breath
 upon my belly, the enticing wreath
 of light around the faces leaning close
 to mine. Sweet baby, little one, papoose,
 I gum a smile as all eyes turn toward
 me. So far, newness is its own reward.
 And every day my sister, brother, four
 and three, push their small noses through the bars
 to sniff me out, to see how well I learn
 about belonging, order, taking turns.

BEST BEHAVIOR

The order of belonging: took my turn,
 distinguishing myself by being born
 after the one time she miscarried, so
 began successful. Slid right out, although
 I weighed nine pounds, eleven ounces; won
 advantage points for that good deed alone.
 Cooperated, raised no ruckus, gave
 no lip, never provoking push to shove.
 Named for a saint who founded convents, I
 gained favor early in the arms and eyes
 of nuns, my mother's friends. One photograph
 shows Sister Michael cradling me; the stiff
 wings of her veil surround me like a tent.
 I sleep, already vowed, obedient.