

## Cover Art

## Artist's Statement: The Girl in Blue and Her Dying Newborn

My painting *The Girl in Blue and Her Dying Newborn* honors a teenaged Ugandan mother and her baby boy whom I cared for in a community-based hospital in Central Uganda. The baby was born in a rural village and died the next day shortly after I met him.

Uganda's rate of teenage pregnancy is 25%—one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Africa. Compared with infants born to mothers between the ages of 20 and 29, stillbirth and newborn deaths are 50% higher among infants born to teenage mothers.<sup>1</sup>

My poem "Girl Mother Blue" accompanies my painting to honor this young mother and her baby boy's too-short life.

### Girl Mother Blue

In you walked, a Ugandan girl.  
Flip flops, espresso skin, jet-black kinked hair  
Your blue dress with a big curve  
Like a distant road that you sped up to take  
And now your ninth grade desk is empty  
And you're never skipping rope again  
Because that bundled green blanket you're  
holding  
Holds you

Blood ran down your bare legs as sharp spasms  
Split your pelvic bones, a tidal wave pounding

Shell and stone against a red coral reef  
Clamped hinge cleaved open, oyster bone  
and flesh  
Squeezed, pushed, torn with a scream, until  
his pearly head  
Emerged, matted with slicked wisps of black  
hair,  
His finger-thick arms tugged and pulled,  
Until he fell limp into your powder blue  
school skirt  
His wet cry, a brief whimper in the  
midnight air  
As you cradled him like a doll in your red  
clay hut

Your day old baby boy, cold and quiet  
like you  
Waited for the blanket to be unwrapped  
His thin skin gleamed and his dime-sized  
eyes opened  
As I placed oxygen prongs into his tiny  
nostrils  
And begged him to breathe  
His sparrow chest heaved and his  
walnut-sized heart stuttered  
As you stood and stared at him  
Your mouth covered with your blue jacket  
With tears glistening down your smooth  
cheeks  
For thirty minutes you held him against your  
chest  
As his tiny breaths, beats of a butterfly wing,  
Faded into blue and he was gone  
Like his father  
And your childhood

As you departed, a mother with an empty  
blanket.



The Girl in Blue and Her Dying Newborn

### Ryan M. McAdams, MD

**R.M. McAdams** is associate professor, Division of Neonatology, Department of Pediatrics, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington; e-mail: mcadams@uw.edu.

### Reference

- 1 Williamson N. United Nations Population Fund State of World Population Report 2013. *Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the Challenge of Adolescent Pregnancy*. New York, NY: United Nations Population Fund; 2013.