

Woeman Womb Prisoned

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the conclusion of Claire Harris's long poem "Woeman Womb Prisoned." The work takes the form of two parallel, complementary poems, one in Roman and the other in italic font; this required setting them side by side, one on the verso, the other on the recto pages. Of the poem, Harris states: "Three years ago, or thereabouts, in Calgary, a fifteen-year-old gave birth alone in a bath tub. With the help of her brother, the baby was wrapped in a doll's diaper, placed in a box, and put out to the kindness of strangers. Thin cries unheard, the baby froze to death. The poem attempts to examine this young woman's experience in the light of the gendered past."

eyes search clocks remember Father she screams "CUT IT OFF!"
OK OK Josh searches nail scissors looks at the dead purple thing
joining his sister to her baby Should I get hot water they look at
each other "It said in the book you knot it at both ends wash the
scissors" he kneels trying not to look Will it hurt "*It's dead*" he
swings away violently sick she throws a towel over her self quickly
"What time is it" Nearly four they fumble together the baby
squalls squalls their eyes meet Can't you feed *it* she draws back
into herself "No No No No" there is this bloody mess she sits a
long time cramps after-birth bleeding He'll smell . . . faint fearful
she lysols tub wall floor hangs new towels five-twenty she can hear
it she makes a bundle of towels rags leans her way to her room
thin insistent squalling again Josh wraps the baby intently old
blue blanket she's used for Boogie Bear he lines the box with
newspapers suggests she fold towels says gruff If He finds out
He'll kill us Mrs. Jameson loves kids let's give *it* to her startled
pleased she begins to cry "Josh that's great! really rad!" Oh shut

up this room stinks i'll take *it* now "Think *it's* warm enough" she
stares at the tiny red face "i'd better feed her" she pushes her
nipple into *its* lips squeezes as she has seen in films baby doesn't
know how either creamish stuff trickles from *its* mouth *it* pulls on
her breast squalls You're not doing it right hurry He'll be home
"Okay Josh OK" she cuddles the warm body solid like Boogie
Bear but squirming "She has my eyes Put more towels on it's cold
think they'll hear her" *It's* your baby she feels sick wraps Bear's
diaper between tiny legs that other mouth no no daughter
should go naked

from half way down
the stairs she watches him
carry her burden out relief
lifts her she is swirling round
and round in a high place
full of white birds
their thin cries
with out threat wings brush her
face flutter in her tummy

she hears the door slam shut
smiles it is only Josh

*because we believe in en(dis)abling difference
in the secret heart we believe
at coiled root we believe
we believe it a matter of science
we think it a matter of truth
if we do not build on "fact" what is
shelter except "faith" but
science constructs a fiction religion
a myth then hastens to strengthen
shoring up walls of words finding
bedrock raising columns to legitimize
to rationalize the political
under such roofs we empty goblets of metaphor
suck the marrow of image
and they become and bone
of our bone they speak us
run wild in our stories structure
our making our dreams
incorrigible
our text our games our lives
because we fear the desert its loneliness
because we do not know how to start over
lay foundations neuter old metaphor
dream new dreams
how to see through see
beyond screens of culture/gender/race
to persons I write
for us all we must change
the fictions before the fictions
play us out their unsubtle denouements
skies without cloud
earth without rivers or smiles*

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