## 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

and lonely for each other caught in this

dance of ancestral design forever in the ring of their fires their fears their primeval night lapping

careful of the circle

we weave in and out of
their drumming their call
and response the piercing
threnody of our mothers
each shuffle each swaying
body shaping shaping we carry
earth arms heads all true to their
terrible instinct

their grammar of the sexes

whatever the age demands knowing the blood rush knowing pain bloodrush searing mutilation soul-pain bloodrush fear pain knowing too women do not howl it annoys it angers it's impolit(e)ic

his/her: determiner- also indicates ownership if perceived as pronoun

main/significant: adjective- in English between the determiner and its noun only an adjective & its intensifier may be placed / also implies others less significant

squeeze/other: noun- a different part of the universe of being /
the act of pressing the juice out of something; usually
the object is discarded after its usefulness has
evaporated. WHYWHYWHY

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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