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Tara Pearson

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Maternal Instinct

By Tara Pearsonⁱ

After my nephew was born, tiny bluish body sliding
from my sister's blood reddened vagina—
she clutched and pawed at the nurses,
grasping to bring him immediately back into her circle of being—
I knew then there would be no births for me.

How do women unearth instinct?

It is as if the song my soul sings
for the grace of the world's children
is not enough.
It is as if that dumb
pocket of muscle should
cry out to be filled.

After reading about Nisa,
a South African !Kung woman, and her lone birth—
back pressed into bark, thighs against
the grit of the earth, pain shrieking across her stomach,
after a baby, wet and gasping,
lay in-wait on night-cold sand—

time and distance unfurled
and a space opened
between mother and child still connected
by slick umbilical rope.

It is Nisa's moment of hesitation—
the space where *instinct* became *choice*—
that allows my womb to speak,
the possibility of motherhood to circle back.

ⁱ Tara J. Pearson is an Assistant Editor for *American Anthropologist* and will be receiving an MFA in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College this May. tjp239@yahoo.com