

When They Were Born

Linda Albert

She watched as though
from another country,
the mirror positioned between
her legs, a more chaste picture
than she expected. She thought
she'd be humiliated by the exposure
but all she thought about
was her baby, struggling to get out
as each have had their struggles since,
while she—still thinking they were hers,
housed as they once were inside her—
taking her all to bring them to life—
and her job always to keep them there—
in life. “Stop pushing!” the doctor warned,
the cruelest words she'd ever heard,
when all her being was made for pushing.
“I can't,” she croaked, but she obeyed;
Anything for those, her most creative gifts.

Now they are grown, as impossible
to believe as the original labors, and once again
she must stop pushing: “I didn't think I was,”
she says. “It's been so long since they left home.”
But freedom comes at higher and higher prices,

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both theirs and hers. These days no rituals exist for adults to go alone into the wilderness of their own lives, face demons and catastrophes from which no one else can save them. No rituals exist for mothers to let go, no midwives or medicine men to cut belated cords.

Only fortitude and oxymorons can protect them as they learn to share the distance these second births demand.