



ELLINE LIPKIN

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AMONG MOTHERS

after Philip Levine's "Among Schoolchildren"

I walk among the rows of new mothers
settled like islands on the parenting
classroom floor, babies half-seen,
half-shrouded, wrapped as tightly
as possible to draw their tiny bodies back.

Each spills: bags, snacks, blankets, pads.
Tiny compartments filled with miniature
items previously never known: the round
pacifier pouch with its zip and clip,
Cheerios cup with starfish opening,
silicone nipples graded slow-flo to fast,
and bundles of wipes, each marked
for nose, bottom, face, and hands.

Treading carefully to an open patch
we settle, baby weight still in each body,
baby weighted now in arms, yeast
rising from the top of each head
as our bodies, ciphered, stitched, stained,
shocked, leak and spill, left on tap.

We sink into the drone of the morning,
each sudden sound both urgent and tedious
as time becomes a bleating telegraph
drilling unknown code — the hour
long short, short long, quick, tap
tap, staccato of boredom suddenly
rising into rushed arpeggio flooding.

Just weeks ago we walked the wards,
bent low to hear the newborn's breath,
stuttering and majestic, *such wonder*
in their sleep, such purpose in their eyes,
as our ravaged edges bled, bellies rent,
hollowed, robbed, so that each cell
could then reknit our sundered selves,
a revenant left to ghost our now extracted hearts.