Stop Crying

Linda Morganstein*
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In 1954
babies burst from the womens’ spread legs
while they dozed forgotten
under a blanket of anesthesia
then woke like amnesiacs
surrounded by strangers,

hours later,
an eternity really,
faceless nurse swooping in
with a pulsating bundle
like a bag of worms—
take it, this is yours,
yours forever, take it home
and take care of it:

three a.m.
why is it always crying?
please make it stop crying

in the park
they stroll
their living dolls
handknitted caps knotted tightly
under fat little chins
straps biting
red marks across
tiny cheeks

What did Dr. Spock say?
I can’t find anything
in the index
under “endless crying”
Morganstein

each night
they stand
shivering
in the doorway
staring at the cradled lump
thinking
is it really mine? maybe if I
had felt it come out—

I've got to make it stop
I've got to make it stop crying

They meet in the grocery
comparing with a vengeance
their swaddled prizes
judging size and color,
weight,
like melons

thank God
it's finally quiet
God forgive me, my hands are on fire,
But at least
it's stopped crying

they gather at kitchen tables
drinking coffee
watching for signs
that someone feels like they do inside

then run home
when the pressure has grown too strong
inside their stomachs,
clutching their babies against their chests,
afraid to look over their shoulder

while their hearts beat too fast
as though something is sneaking up behind them
to say
"I saw what you did."