

Matrilineal

KAREN HOFMANN

resentment flutters, frayed string
from every conversation

or, should-have-given yanks
against best-I-could
till the line
becomes a taut ribbon
decorated with cut glass

or, I give my daughters
everything, everything
 nothing
to reproach me with

or, the noose through which
daughters and mothers
are born

when you, my first daughter, arrived
your father, seeing the thick purple stump
said, *a boy*

but no, no
and every day, we re-plait this stubborn cord

Anthropology of the Tongue

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in that country, girls of five years
have their tongues removed

it's a beautiful old ritual: the fathers
tenderly pinning their daughters

to the bed, the mothers
performing the delicate excision

careful to scrape out the soft bulb,
the persistent roots, the ganglion

older girls and women talk among themselves
hands fluttering like fed pigeons

they send me messages:
they miss me, they have more stories

they are signalling from the dark

Theory

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After even the thin quiet ones in the corner
have yawned, stretched
and drained their splendid cups,

after the gathering up
of all the bright spilled skeins
into the capacious carpet bags,

the scientists arrive on the scene
and declare that the female orgasm
has no evolutionary purpose.