

Ancient Fanfiction: Birthing Woman

By Celine Baumbach

I had been prepared for pain, I thought, but I had not been prepared for the length of it. It lapped up my body in waves, each one of them making it harder and harder to breath. And with every breath, the pain just grew. Every moment of awareness was agony. I stared at the bed at the other side of the room, wishing I could lay down and pass out.

“There’s time for that later, love,” my grandmother said by my side. I hadn’t realized I’d spoken aloud.

I looked away from her and at the circle of protection drawn into the dirt floor around me. The sun had set since the pain had started, and the candles and torches were not enough to light up the room completely. At the edge of the circle on the floor, shadows danced like little demons, taunting and threatening me.

We’re coming for you, their slim, shapeless forms seemed to say, you cannot outlast us. Sooner or later you’re going to die.

I let out a low groan, letting my head fall back and closing my eyes.

“It’s not going to be long now,” the midwife said from between my legs. She had been kneeling on the floor for a while now, occasionally patting my knee or rubbing soothing strokes into my thigh.

I groaned again, in frustration this time. She had said the same thing when she had given me a herbal mixture a couple of hours earlier, and it had not come true then. It would not come true now either. The time ahead would be an eternity still.

And at the end of it were the demons. *We will devour you whole.*

My sister appeared at my side and began wiping away my sweat with a cool towel. “Just breathe,” she murmured. “Just breathe, love.”

Pain washed over me, sharp and debilitating. I groaned again.

On the ceiling, the shadows continued dancing gleefully, uncaring of the protective charms the women of the neighborhood had woven for me, uncaring of their prayers to Bes for the health of

my baby and me. Uncaring for my grandmother’s prayers to Taweret. I screamed, and they delighted in the sound.

“Breathe,” my sister repeated. “Just-“

On the ceiling, the shadows changed. A short one, wielding a hammer had come among them, and as they cowered away from him, they became silent.

“It’s time,” the midwife said.

I grasped my sister’s hand in mine, squeezing hard. I prayed to Bes, picturing his face in my head, while breathing fast. I screamed with pain. And the baby’s scream joined mine.

Read about birth in ancient Egypt here:

<https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/childbirth-magic/>

Image:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Egyptian_-_Magic_Wand_Depicting_a_Procession_of_Deities_-_Walters_71510.jpg

