**Harriet by the Swings**

(a 5 minute play by Claire Booker)

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 **Characters**

Harriet: 20-50s – dressed in black.

Tam: Late teens – dressed in leggings and sloppy T shirt that reveals her pregnancy bump.

Sam: 20-40s – a well-dressed yummy mummy who carries her baby in a front sling.

Pam: 20-40s – a harassed mum, dressed in a hurry, pushes her baby in a pram.

 **Props and Set**

 Props include a carrycot, a baby-sling, a realistic baby doll, a second doll that can be swaddled. There is an open set with no furniture. The action takes place outside a toddler’s play area.

 (*Lights rise on Tam who is heavily pregnant. She caresses her ‘bump’ then begins to sing a playground rhyme)*

Tam One elephant began to play, upon a spider’s web one day. He thought it such tremendous fun, that he called for another elephant to come . . .

 *(Sam enters, carrying her baby in a sling. She positions herself behind Tam and places her hands on Tam’s shoulders. Still linked, they march round in a circle, singing jauntily)*

 Two elephants began to play, upon a spider’s web one day. They thought it such tremendous fun, that they called for another elephant to come . . .

 *(they stop and look expectantly into the distance. Pam hurries into view, holding a carrycot in which there is a baby)*

Pam Sorry.

 *(Pam takes up position, one hand on Sam’s shoulder, the carrycot taking up the rear, then all three march round singing in a circle)*

All Three elephants began to play, upon a spider’s web one day. They thought it such tremendous fun, that they called for another elephant to come . . .

 *(Harriet creeps forward hesitantly. The others look hopefully into the distance, but fail to see her)*

 They called for another elephant to come . . .

 *(They continue to wait expectantly. Harriet reaches the carrycot, looks inside and sighs loudly. The others spin round, spot her and panic)*

Pam No!

Sam Christ!

Tam You what?

Sam *(points at Harriet)* You!

Tam What?

Sam You!

Pam  *(she pulls her baby from the pram)* Quick!

Sam *(calls out to her child)* Thomas!

Tam *(calls out to her children)* Lianne! Shane! Darren! *(they race around gathering children)* Come here!

Harriet *(Harriet closes in on Pam and the baby)* Harriet is a monster, with an opening as wide as . . . aaaaaaaaah . . .

Pam Sam?

Sam Quick! *(Pam throws the baby over Harriet’s head to Sam)*

Harriet *(Harriet tries to catch the baby)* Hungry!

Sam *(Sam dodges Harriet with several netball moves)* Tam? Tam!

Tam Christ! *(Sam throws the baby to Tam, who has no choice but to catch it)*

Harriet *(Harriet leaps and fails again)* Hungry!

Tam *(Tam clutches the baby and backs away as Harriet moves with menace towards her)* Fff fff ff fu u u . . . . . . .

Sam You!

Tam . . . u u u uck.

Sam Monster. *(Tam hurls the baby to Pam in a high arc over Harriet’s head)*

Harriet *(Harriet leaps, but fails again)* Aaaaaah!

 (*Pam hugs the baby tight and the three women form a protective circle)*

Women Monster, monster, monster, monster, monster . . .

Harriet *(deeply enraged)* Harriet curls her tongue around each succulent umbilicus . . .

Women . . . monster, monster, monster . . .

Harriet . . . flicks it through pious lips, crunches nitty gritty on pith of clavicle and rib, stirrups up her knees, then prays and from her rattling paunch lets clap the gas of unlived lives.

 *(gradually the women quieten down. One by one, they turn away from Harriet and start moving their arms back and forth as if pushing swings)*

Harriet hides her shame under night’s black burka, eyes up warm cots and with her claw, strokes pink-flushed cheeks of sleeping escapees. Lullabies them against her vacuum-packed heart . . . *(tender but sinister hum as she rocks an imaginary baby)*. . . mm maa mmm maaaa. So soft their downy heads, so good to trap between her palms, CRRRRRRRRRAAAAAACK as the roar of Krakatoa wrenched the Cosmos belly out with the snap of a latex glove.

*(The women make encouraging ‘weeeee’ sounds as they push the swings)*

Harriet is a crawling lava flow, thick oozing others’ fertile slopes. Her breath,the death that lurks in bull bars, ligatures, leukaemia and the silent knife that ribs fit boys.

*(Pam stops and turns round anxiously)*

Take care you hopscotch girls to leap the cracks,you mothers all despair.

*(Pam and Tam also turn round anxiously)*

Watch for her there, where prams are filled with glistening fruit and read inside her cut-glass smile, the prayer . . .

*(Harriet drops to her knees in front of the empty carrycot)*

Fill me with child, with child, WITH CHILD!

*(Lights fade to Final Black Out)*

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