

## Making a Reality of My Own

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*Ho, Louis, my secular god son. Hey, little old man with your half-crown of hair edging the fontanelles of your birth. You, in your jump-suit, all rabbits and falling leaves, you are rocked, lulled to sweet, peaceful sleep. Small frowns chase across your forehead and your fists ball, fighting the air and creasing the plumpness of flesh.*

*Your eyes open to blink away dust. They swim with tears as that mouth opens to a cavernous cartoon-O of injustice and cries that pierce the ears. You are passed between arms and laps, cradled and crooned, distracted and calmed.*

*And now you nestle in arms that are made for this. It is us, the two of us. We two comfortable people: you small and calmed; I cupping tiny feet in the palm of my hands. You turn your gaze to mine, intense study, eyes navy blue, and smile.*

The first time I met Louis, tears sprang to my eyes, a combination of tightened throat and hollowed heart. I weep for what I haven't got and for the body that makes it so difficult to attain.

I have no child, yet I am felled by exhaustion and malaise and the unpredictability of relapse. Mine is an illness exacerbated by noise, by intense activity and sustained exertion, and my arms are empty still. How do I switch parenthood on and off as illness demands? Long hours in bed, too ill to read or write or talk, make time for thought. The images of Louis are lodged in my mind. I want to watch a baby of my own grow from infancy to childhood, into teen-age and on to adulthood.

I make fictitious bargains: for a child I will risk this and this and this. In return for the co-operation of my body I will trade its range. But I have limits - aspects of illness, of life, that are an exchange too far. I battle the fear of knowing how bad things can be and I battle the fear of knowing nothing at all.

Elbowing past the impossibility of flesh and blood, through a quagmire of can I and could I, and how, my resolve progresses and regresses and I move forward. I will use my body - *this* body. I will watch it work, discovering its possibilities, in awe of its results.

I hold in my mind the warmth and the breath of Louis, my arms encircling him. In the small hours, conviction finds me. There is a way to make this happen. I shall be a wonderful mother and, in a rejection of all caution, I will tear down hurdles and broadside the judgements of others. I will block all the murmurs of

how hard, how easy, how irresponsible, and just how. With these arms that are waiting and in an absence of solutions I shall dream a remedy of my own.

My child will have Borrowed Parents. I can pick up the phone and they will leap into the breach. I will find the courage to ask for help. There in crisis, but with an involvement that stretches wider, these Borrowed Parents are more than parental friend, hanger-on, adoptive aunts or uncles; I trust them with the life and welfare of my own child. Wanting a child in their lives, they will make a friend of mine and my child's friendship is their reciprocation. They will take time to know my child, and me, to grasp our priorities and our desires and work with them. And, from somewhere, I will find within me the generosity to share.

Through them, my child catches the latest movie and plays in the park, there is a hand to hold at the dentist, a listener on the journey home from school. For when I am *too* ill, beyond the day-by-day of ill. My child's Borrowed Parents are my silence, my peace, my time for restoration where rest and sleep keep illness at bay. They make the quiet times in which I can *be* ill, a pause before I return to the haste of motherhood.

My child will live in a family extending far beyond nuclear notions. I take the seed of an idea from a friend and I make it my own. My child weaves through an infinity of relationships and guardians, a family that unfolds beyond boundaries. Parents and grandparents, friends and allies, mutuality with autonomy. Our family is extended, yet my child is my own.

I must find a way to transform dominating thought and habitual ache. I have reached an age, or perhaps a stage, and everywhere I am haunted by the motherhood of others. And my arms are open, waiting.