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All of Us Are Real: Old Images in a New World of Adoption

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As someone who for over twenty-five years has written and taught about cultural myths and images, I had the hubris to imagine that I was savvy about all the major norms and assumptions that comprise contemporary Western “constructions of reality.” That was before we adopted a child.

I am one of those baby boomers who “forgot to have children” until my early forties. Once we began trying, I was amazed, then distraught, when pregnancy didn’t happen as it had, unplanned, when I was thirty: the very first time the birth control barrier was down. Susan Sarandon, exactly my age, was radiantly pregnant; in fact, it seemed that every movie star of my generation was. *People* magazine was celebrating: “it’s never too late!” So I was startled when my doctor sternly put a damper on my enthusiasm. “It’s going to be an uphill battle,” he warned, writing out a prescription I was sure I didn’t need.

I won’t go on to detail about how I didn’t get pregnant (a prelude to every adoption story I’ve ever read). As in those stories, we tried, it didn’t happen, and I was grief-stricken. Eventually, after nine months of mysterious allergies and ear problems (which—no kidding—I once described to my psychotherapist as “blocked Fallopian tubes”), I simply gave the child thing up. Or so I thought. Adoption never occurred to me; my fantasies of being a mother were completely entangled with the desires to be pregnant, give birth, and reproduce our highly flawed but precious family line.

When I turned fifty, I realized that although my longing to give birth had expired, a very different desire had simply been deferred. And I saw—with the same sure knowledge as when I was thirty-six and knew that it was either quit smoking right then or die an early death—that the jig was up. Somehow, over the years, seemingly without my even noticing the process, the longing for parenthood had emerged from its entanglements with other dreams and fantasies, and now issued a stark ultimatum: now or never. Adoption—not merely from necessity but because a paradigm shift had taken place in my psyche—now seemed perfectly, wonderfully right. The desire to be a mother had overtaken my thwarted longing to experience pregnancy and birth, and biological connection, quite unexpectedly, now seemed utterly superfluous, irrelevant.

Being an adoptive parent—for almost four years now—has taught me many things. I've learned, for one thing, how cruelly ignorant children's books and videos can be, even in these purportedly "politically correct" times. *Stuart Little*, the classic book by E. B. White, was altered for the 1999 children's movie, so that Stuart the mouse is now an adoptive child of the Littles rather than one born to them (as he is in the book). I'm not sure I understand the reason for the change. Perhaps screenwriters M. Night Shyamalan and Greg Brooker thought contemporary children would not buy the idea of a mouse as the biological child of human parents (although Shyamalan seems to have had no problem asking grown-ups to accept nearly as bizarre goings-on in his thrillers *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable*). Perhaps they wanted to find a way of adding drama to the charming but not particularly plot-driven original. Or perhaps they actually wanted to make the story more relevant to lives of contemporary families. Statistics released in 1997 by the Evan Donaldson Adoption Institute of New York showed that six of every ten Americans have either been adopted, adopted a child, placed a child for adoption, or had a family member or close friend who was adopted.¹ We are living in "Adoption Nation," as Adam Pertman calls it.

If Shyamalan and Brooker were interested in making their film more "relevant" in this way, they should have done some homework about adoption. If they had, they might have avoided constant references to Stuart's biological parents as his "real" parents. And they might have thought twice about a plot line (stolen from *Annie*) in which those "real" parents (in fact, it's a scam; his biological parents are dead) descend on the Littles and simply take Stuart away. My daughter loves *Stuart Little*, and we watch it all the time. But Cassie is three, and although we talk to her about her adoption, she doesn't really get it yet. When she does, will she wonder whether Amy, her birth mother, will appear at our door some rainy night and take her away while we stand helpless? *Annie's* scam is clearly a fake from the start. (Cassie asked me the other day why Miss Hannigan—the director of the orphanage, who tries to pass herself off as Annie's long-lost biological mother for the reward Daddy Warbucks is offering—is "pretending like that.") But when those tiny con-mice come to the door, so authentically "little"—not in name only, as with Stuart's adoptive family—it's a moment of narrative uncertainty about who Stuart's "real" mommy and daddy are.

Fairy tales, of course, are full of wicked stepparents, traumas of abandonment, and other scary elements that, according to Bruno Bettelheim and others, empower children to confront, voice, and be reassured about anxieties they might otherwise keep to themselves.² It's sometimes hard to figure out, however, whether a story is providing an occasion for mastering fears or merely creating new ones—inspired more, perhaps, by adult sensi-

bilities and anxieties than by insight into the emotional world of children. Stuart's adoption is contested by his biological parents—a plot line ripped from the headlines, as it were. And even before the pretenders show up, Stuart has begun searching for his roots, describing his feelings in distinctively contemporary jargon: he has a “missing piece,” an “empty space” inside him.

Perhaps the most troubling thing to me about *Stuart Little* is the way the film makes fun of these notions, as the Littles explain to the director of the orphanage why they want to know who Stuart's biological parents are, in a scene that is unmistakably satirical in intent. “He has an *empty space*,” Mrs. Little points out gravely. The director nods, with mock-tragic knowingness. If this were a sophisticated comedy aimed at grown-ups, one could enjoy the jibing at this phrase as a healthy send-up of talk-show and movie-of-the-week therapy-speak; postmoderns, on their part, may welcome it as a parody of what Arjun Appadurai calls the “ideologies of authenticity” that encourage us to imagine there is a “truth” of identity to be found somewhere—in origins, blood ties, etc.³ The hilarity fades, however, if you imagine that the viewer is a child with feelings much like Stuart's. And there are such viewers (although they are clearly not much at the forefront of Shyamalan's consciousness). For, however socially constructed the metaphors may be, “missing pieces” and “empty spaces” are just the terms adolescents who have no knowledge of their biological origins use to describe their feelings of unease and incompleteness.⁴

Despite the seemingly adoption-friendly message of *Stuart Little* that it's not necessary to look like your mom and dad in order to be a part of the family (not necessary to be big in order to be a Little), the film does not normalize adoption so much as exploits it. Yes, it's a charming and often witty film, and far easier for adults to bear in repetitive viewing than “The Little Engine That Could.” But its pleasures for me require an all-too-familiar compromise with the oblivious hubris of a dominant cultural paradigm. In contrast, the wonderful *Babe*, without mentioning the word “adoption” at all, portrays a world in which the creation of new, nonbiological families is the norm. The losses are not denied (Fly mourns her puppies; Babe grieves for his biological mom). But the new bonds, once established, are deep and indestructible.

Thankfully for the adoptive parent—and for the nonadoptive parent who wants her child to know that families are made in a myriad of ways—there are more and more children's books being published that, while very specific in the particular stories each tells, taken together describe a new world of families without a racial, sexual, or biological norm at its center. Rose Lewis's *I Love You like Crazy Cakes* and Eve Bunting's *Jim Woo* tell stories of international adoptions, one by a single mother and the other from

the point of view of an older brother, also adopted, struggling with his feelings about the coming baby. Joanna Cole's *How I Was Adopted* and Jamie Lee Curtis's *Tell Me Again about the Night I Was Born* recount stories of private domestic adoptions, in which the phone rings and parents are told their longed-for baby has been born. Virginia Kroll's *Beginnings: How Families Come to Be* describes how six different (in ethnicity, class, circumstances of birth) children became a part of their own unique families, biological and adoptive. In *A Mother for Choco*, a little yellow bird searching for a mother who looks like him is ultimately "adopted" by a very loving bear who looks nothing like him (or any of her other children). Marguerite Davol's *Black, White, Just Right!* and Ellen Senisi's *For My Family, Love, Allie* are about biological, interracial families, the former with a black mom and white dad, the latter with a white mom and black dad. None of these books is perfect, but using them all as part of a program of reading about varied families tends to cancel out the limitations or overstatements of each. (I'm still waiting, however, for one in which the birth mom is present as more than just a fleeting moment of the child's ancient history.)

Children's books on adoption have clearly advanced significantly beyond Valentina Wasson's *The Chosen Baby*, originally published in 1939 and updated in 1950, which—until the success of Curtis's *Tell Me Again about the Night I Was Born* alerted publishers to the growing market for adoption narratives—was virtually the only children's book available on the subject. So long as it stood alone as *the* recommended book to read one's children, the white, middle-class, heterosexual family depicted in *The Chosen Baby* operated in a far more normative way than it might today. But *The Chosen Baby* also created a metaphor for reassuring adoptive children of their parents' love for them that has proved, I think, even more damaging. The notion of being "chosen," it turns out, does not confer a sense of specialness, but of difference—and a haunting reminder that if one was chosen, one also might have been rejected and might yet still be. (The film *Stuart Little*, which begins by having the Littles visit an orphanage to "pick out" a brother for George, finally settling on Stuart from among a sea of children, perpetuates this model.) A related idea is that an adoptive child is a "precious gift," which, as Lynn Franklin, author of *May the Circle Be Unbroken*, points out, can "mean the difference between feeling like an object and feeling like a person" (p. 132). She recounts how adoptee Abigail Johnson told her that throughout her childhood she carried an image in her mind that her parents went to pick her out at a department store, where she sat in a glass case as her parents pointed to her: "That's the one I want." "Children," Franklin comments, "do not want to be chosen. They just want to be born" (p. 133). In other words, the best way to approach adoption with a child is to normalize it, not to make it "special."

(Nowadays, of course, adoptive parents are more likely to be the “chosen” ones—by agencies and birth mothers—than their children are.)

Assessing children’s adoption narratives through my new eyes as an adoptive parent made me want to revisit grown-up adoption movies, to see what might be lurking there. The best I can say for these films is that the ill-informed fantasies about birth parents and adoptive parents are almost evenly distributed. I say “fantasies” not because there aren’t rich, adoptive parents who “shop around” for genetically promising birth parents (*The Baby Dance*), or white families who adopt black children and treat race as irrelevant (*Losing Isaiah*), or black birth mothers who are crack-addicts (*Losing Isaiah*), or poor, white birth mothers who are hostile to prenatal care, while their unemployed husbands try to extort money and gifts from the desperate adoptive couple (*The Baby Dance*). The problem is that these representations are all we have to inform our public “imaginary” about adoption—these, and the real-life dramas of children being torn from the arms of their adoptive families by birth parents reclaiming their biological children. These cases are extraordinarily rare, but they so haunt prospective adoptive parents that many seek an international adoption just to be sure they will never have to deal with birth parents.

I’m particularly sensitive to the way birth parents are represented, because ours is an “open” adoption. We met Cassie’s birth mother Amy and her family three months before Cassie was born, and I returned and stayed in Abilene, where the family lives, for three weeks before the birth. Those weeks were amazing and forged bonds of intimacy that still feel intact, despite increasingly long stretches of noncontact. But our first meeting, in an Embassy Suites restaurant, was strained and frightening for all involved. Fearful that this just-turned-fifteen-year-old birth mom and her thirty-six-year-old beautician mother would gape in horror at the fifty-two-year-old lines and sags not evident in our glossy brochure (“We are both nuts about animals . . .”; “Our friends and family are the center of our lives . . .”; “Our house is surrounded by meadows and trees . . .”; “A great thing about our jobs is their flexible schedules”; and so on), I had teased and pouffed my hair to a *largesse* beyond high school and applied my make-up with Joan Collins on *Dynasty* in mind. (My husband, six years older than I, was not as concerned about how his face played, but we did stop and buy him a sexy new jacket.) Amy, on her part, was buttoned up to her chin in a demure blouse and was silent throughout dinner. She seemed to be concentrating all her energies on simply enduring, saying “thank you” when required and producing an occasional wan smile. Despite my best efforts over the next few days to make her comfortable with me—which had rarely failed me as a teacher but proved woefully inadequate in this circumstance—she remained that way for our entire first visit, while her

mother ViSue and I, who hit it off almost immediately, discussed her future (and the men who had done us wrong) in smoky bars.

In the four years since, there have been visits, phone calls, photos, and videos exchanged—just as in any extended family whose members are separated geographically—and I've come to know Amy, who is now nineteen, quite well. It hasn't been easy, in no small part because when the wall of silence and politeness began to crack, what emerged was very painful to face. During that first visit, both ViSue and Amy's doctor treated us as though the matter were settled, that Amy wanted the adoption, that we had been "chosen" to be the parents of her child, and we eagerly responded to the reassuring signals they sent our way. So, when ViSue invited us to accompany them to Amy's next sonogram, and Dr. Bass handed that precious photo to me, I took it, weeping with joy—and not one of us asked Amy how she felt about any of it. I took my cue not only from Dr. Bass but also from cultural imagery—for, after all, hadn't I seen moments just like this in *Immediate Family* and other adoption movies? In the pop opera version of the open adoption, birth mothers take their infants back (invariably to return them after a period of confronting their own inadequacy as mothers), but until the postpartum turnaround, it's just one big happy family: the adoptive mom wiping the sweat from the birth mom's brow in delivery, the adoptive dad cutting the cord.

In real life, the dramatic arc of an open adoption is usually the reverse: ambivalence and wariness come before clarity and intimacy, and it's the intimacy—hard-won, not movie-magical—that ultimately resolves the ambivalence. In real life, birth moms in open adoptions are less likely to change their minds when bonds have developed in acknowledgement of their love, loss, and grief, not in a fervor to deny them. But I had to learn this. When Amy, who had been lying silently throughout the sonogram, jumped up from the table, dressed hurriedly, and ran angrily out of the office to her mother's car, slamming the door behind her, refusing to talk to any of us, I was startled and horrified—and panicked. Everything became reconfigured, and I realized in what denial I had been about Amy's feelings. It was easy because she refused to express them, and the people whom I assumed knew her best were pulling the train. But the fact was—as I learned from ViSue only after an anxiety-ridden week during which I was sure that Amy had changed her mind—that Amy was furious at us all for simply turning over maternal privileges to me. That sonogram, it turned out, meant a great deal to her as a concrete symbol and reminder of the fact that although she was going to relinquish Cassie to me after her birth, during those nine months she was still her mother. She wanted us all to acknowledge that rather than to erase it. She wanted to be allowed to be Cassie's mother, if only for those few months. Instead, we were all treat-

ing her as a pregnant child and me as already the “real” mother.

I had many sleepless nights after that, and not only because I was afraid Amy would change her mind. One morning, in fact, sobbing to my husband that I couldn’t take Amy’s baby away from her, I almost changed my mind myself. As a feminist, I was appalled at myself for allowing my desire for a baby to wreak such havoc with ethical sensibilities that I had until then assumed to be unbreakable. I had stood there, conducting transactions over the prone, semi-undressed body of a silent, clearly depressed young woman and let myself be lost in the illusion that it was all okay because she was so young and because her mom and her doctor treated her, understandably from their perspective, as a child. But Amy wasn’t my child; she was the very young mother of the baby that I hoped would be my daughter. And in my heart, I of course knew that her age didn’t have anything to do with the issue of whether or not she loved the baby, or wished she could keep her—and certainly didn’t justify treating her as anything less than a full subject, to be consulted about everything involving her body, her baby.

Ultimately, Amy and I developed a very different relationship with each other, in part the result of counseling, which provided a safe, private place for me to give her the acknowledgement she needed and to establish a separate friendship with her apart from her mom. The day we bought matching baby books together, then sat on the floor as she finally told me the whole story of her brief relationship with Cassie’s birth father—producing a picture of a young man so gorgeous that I joked we should forget the baby, I’d just take *him* home—was a breakthrough day for both of us. Which is not to say that there weren’t difficult times after that, and I know there will be more to come. A short story by Marly Swick, about an adoptive mother’s feelings about the pregnant birth mother visiting her, is called “The Ghost Mother.”⁵ Well, even halfway across the country, Amy is anything but a ghostly presence in our lives. I can’t help but imagine, for example, watching movies and shows about adoption, how they might affect her. Mostly, this exercise is painful, as when I heard Rosie O’Donnell describe on *Born in My Heart: A Love Story*, Barbara Walters’s television “special” on adoption, how she tells her three children about how they came to be adopted: “You grew in another lady’s tummy, and God looked inside the tummy and saw there was a mix-up. God knew that you were my baby so he told the lady and she listened to God and she made sure that you came to me, your right family.”

A “mix-up”? I cringe at this word, uttered by one of our foremost adoption proponents and role models. I think of how much pride Amy takes in Cassie, how as I’d brag to her on the phone about Cassie’s beauty and accomplishments, she’d say, “Well, what’d you expect? That’s my girl!”

Amy knows I'm Cassie's mommy. She's not about to steal her away in the middle of the night, and not just because she "relinquished" her "rights" to do so, but because she loves Cassie and knows that her life is with us. But the notion that Cassie's nine months in her body was God's "mix-up" would anger and hurt her terribly.

Moreover, I can't see how a child's believing her origins were a mistake will ultimately serve her sense of security in the world. I do know how Rosie feels; both my husband and I, like many other adoptive parents, have experienced the conviction that Cassie was "meant" to be our child. But Cassie doesn't need to be reassured of that; she, like Rosie's children, has been with us virtually from birth and doesn't require a myth of quasi-biological ordainment in order to feel that we are her "right family." What she will need, however, as interviews with adoptive children reveal, is the reassurance that she was not given up casually or because she was "too much trouble." On the same show, ABC anchor Carole Simpson tells her eighteen-year-old son Adam the details of his relinquishment (in front of the camera and for the very first time!): his birth mother, she tells him, was twenty, a student in architecture, and wanted to keep the baby; her parents were the force behind the adoption, they wanted her to stay in college. What does Adam think about all this, Walters asks. "I'm happy to know my birth mom didn't want to give me up," he replies.

It's not only children who need the knowledge that they were not simply discarded by people without feeling for them. It's also an old cultural myth, born out of a failure of empathy and imagination of settled people with comfortable lives, that anyone who could bear to give up her child must not care very much about her. And it is some credit to movies like *Immediate Family*, *Losing Isaiah*, and *The Baby Dance*—as well as the classic *To Each His Own*—that at least they attempt to refute this myth. But with the exception of *To Each His Own* (the first and to date only adoption film that allows that a child really can have two mothers), "sympathy" for the birth mother does not extend to presenting her as competent, just "loving." (Birth mothers, invariably, are smokers in the movies. With the exception of *The Baby Dance*—whose birth mom has several other children—they handle babies awkwardly. They don't know how to get them to stop crying.)

Adoptive mothers, on the other hand, are typically paragons of maternal virtue, their husbands pillars of strength and forbearance. In *Losing Isaiah*, Isaiah's black birth mother is a crack addict who in a drug swoon one evening simply forgets that she left her baby on a dumpster. The social worker who will eventually become Isaiah's adoptive mother, on the other hand, isn't even just a nice white lady; she has a successful if embattled career counseling and intervening in—guess what—cases of parental

neglect and abuse. She's a saver of babies that others have discarded, the solid, whole, mirror image of the cracked one: Isaiah's birth mom. When Isaiah's mom recovers from her addiction and searches him out, a racialized legal conflict ensues, and the social worker gets to articulate her colorblind concept of raising children, which the film clearly applauds. Question (from the Strident Black Lawyer representing the birth mother): "Does Isaiah have any black dolls?" Answer: "Yes, and he has purple and orange ones, too." She also admits to having no books for him with black people in them. Such responses don't win the case, but they do win the day since, although the court returns Isaiah to his birth mother, she is unable to comfort or care for him and ultimately returns him to the social worker. Thus—despite a weak bow at the end of the film to the importance of Isaiah staying in a daycare where he will meet more black children—the white adoptive mom represents what turns out to be the film's "truth": love not only knows no color, but teaches nothing about color.

This philosophy, in *Losing Isaiah*, is presented as part of what makes the social worker a good mother: she sees through inessentials like race to the realities of the heart. We know these are the film's values for sure during a scene in which little Isaiah places his hand inside his older (white) sister's. "What's the difference?" she asks him. "Your hand is bigger than mine," he replies. Sandra Patton, author of *BirthMarks: Transracial Adoption in Contemporary America*, recounts how one of her interviewees remembers that at that moment the audience where she saw the film went "ahhhh."⁶ Yes, little children are so pure . . . they don't even notice color, and if we only let them be, perhaps they never would. My experience as the mother of a biracial child suggests otherwise. One of the first things Cassie noticed, looking at our feet, was their different color. "Mine are brown. Althea's are brown. Yours and daddy's are . . . (and here she wasn't quite sure for a moment what to call them, then decided) . . . pink." Noticing such differences came naturally to Cassie, and she accepted them as natural; but what the little boys across the street added was not so "pure." "Your skin is all muddy!" they told her one day—and I knew It was beginning. Not that It had ever been absent. But that was the moment Cassie was presented with it. She was two. So much for the superior wisdom of Isaiah's adoptive mother.

This shouldn't be taken as my endorsement of taking children out of adoptive homes in which they've lived for years, in order to satisfy either biological parent's rights or racial identity politics. My criticism of the film is not on that level, but concerns its imagery and its own racial politics. Those are far from "pure" but very squarely aligned with the *Personal Responsibility Act* of the Republican Congressional majority's *Contract with America*, introduced in 1995 (the same year *Losing Isaiah* was released) and

whose original version prohibited any consideration of race in placing a child for adoption—all in the interests of reducing “illegitimacy.” What does concern for “illegitimacy” have to do with promoting *transracial* adoption (as opposed to any and all adoptions)? As Patton points out, the specter of the unmarried, black welfare mother clearly lurks behind and gives the lie to the ideology of “color-blindness” (p. 133). *Losing Isaiah*, like the bill, wasn’t blind to race at all. Its white social worker is the very essence of the good mother, while Isaiah’s biological mom is saddled with all the usual stereotypes of birth mothers, plus those of her race. (Most people who hear that Cassie’s birth mother was fourteen when she got pregnant assume that she’s the black birth parent—although in fact, it’s Cassie’s birth father who is black. Clearly, they are ignorant of the fact that most young black mothers keep their babies; and just as clearly, the image of a sexually “loose,” irresponsible teenager is racially marked for them.)

The movies and dramatic news stories give us the images. And unfortunately, there’s not much on television or in popular magazines countering them with actual information. Shows like *Born in My Heart* present an extraordinarily limited—and increasingly archaic—picture of the theory and practice of adoption. Most of the parents interviewed on the special adopted twenty years ago, when a veil of secrecy (professionals would have called it “privacy”) was the norm, so it’s understandable that they (and those who adopted from China and Romania) know little about their children’s birth parents. But couldn’t Walters have found one example of an adoptive family who is in any kind of communication at all with a birth parent? Here it’s worth remembering both that the practice of sealing adoption information only began on a large scale in the 1930s and 1940s and that fully “open” adoptions—in which contact between birth and adoptive parents is ongoing—have historically been the norm among many African American and rural white communities. Within the latter, the practice is generally limited to members of the extended biological family. But African traditions of extended kinship, carried over into life within slavery, turned whole communities into “fictive” families, and it has been common for children who could not be taken care of by one family to be “informally adopted” by another with whom they had no biological ties.⁷

The extensive contact that we’ve had with Cassie’s maternal birth family is not for everyone, of course. But most people nowadays who participate in domestic adoptions favor at least an exchange of information and pictures between birth and adoptive families, and more and more are recognizing that a “ghost mother” (or father) turns out to be a far more potent presence in a child’s imagination than known birth parents. You wouldn’t know it, however, from *Born in My Heart*. At one point, Connie Chung

says, hamming it up to make a joke of it, that she'd "be suicidal" if her son wanted to search for his biological parents. Chung's husband Maury Povich, elaborating, reveals how serious their anxiety actually is: "I'd feel like we failed. If he loves us as much as we love him, why would he want to do that?" Adopted children whose parents feel this way grow up very much aware of it and often don't even reveal their curiosity about their birth parents for fear of hurting their adoptive parents. "It [searching] would have qualified as a treacherous act against my adoptive parents," says Kimberly Nelson, one of Franklin's interviewees; "Whenever thoughts of my birth family occurred to me, I felt guilt-ridden and dismissed them" (p. 228). Many, as in the film *Secrets and Lies*, wait to search until their adoptive parents have died. Yet there is a by-now extensive literature showing that questions about birth parents emerge in the most stable, loving adoptive families. And when adoptive children feel the need to search (and, despite what *Lifetime* movies would have us believe, not all do), it is almost always, experts agree, not because they want "better parents" but because they want what everyone else takes for granted: knowledge of their genealogy. Ideology of Authenticity? Perhaps. But it's nonetheless the answer to Maury Povich's question.

Walters's documentary itself inadvertently suggests as much during a conversation between newscaster Cynthia McFadden, herself adopted, and Walters's daughter Jackie. Spurred on by McFadden, who has just revealed that when she grew up she always felt like a "poodle in a house of golden retrievers," Jackie reflects on her own curiosity about her biological mother: whether she's "artistic" like herself and "funky and fun"; she wonders how it would be to "walk in the room and see her . . . and she'd have strange earrings on . . . and I'd think—that's me!" Jackie's curiosity is normal. Almost invariably, when adopted children ask about their birth parents, two questions are central: "Why was I given up?" and "Who do I look like?"

I feel very lucky that we can answer these questions for Cassie, show her pictures, tell her anecdotes about her maternal birth family, and continue, hopefully, to see them with some regularity despite the miles between our homes. I hope someday that her birth father will feel comfortable becoming a part of her life, too. I'm nervous, to be sure, about how Cassie will react when it actually registers that Amy, the pretty girl with the Texas drawl who threw her up high in the air when I was still too cautious to do so, is the person in whose body she lived for nine warm, cozy months before her birth. I'm not afraid she'll love me less. Rather, I worry that she'll respond as so many adoptive children do when the implications of the biological facts become real to them: that she'll be sad that she wasn't in *my* tummy.

I feel sad about that, too. I would love to have warmed and nourished her little body from the start, to have had her be a part of me from the very first cell of her adorable being. But, of course, the child for whom that could have been true wouldn't have been my Cassie and would probably have precluded my finding my Cassie. Knowing that now makes my failure to get pregnant the next best thing that ever happened to me.

NOTES

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¹ Adam Pertman, *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution Is Transforming America* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), p. 7.

² Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

³ Arjun Appadurai, quoted in Kath Weston, "Forever Is a Long Time: Romancing the Real in Gay Kinship Ideologies," in *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis*, ed. Sylvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 90.

⁴ See especially Lynn C. Franklin, with Elizabeth Ferber, *May the Circle Be Unbroken: An Intimate Journey into the Heart of Adoption* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998). Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁵ Marly A. Swick, "The Ghost Mother," in *Wanting a Child: Twenty-Two Writers on Their Difficult but Mostly Successful Quests for Parenthood in a High Tech Age*, ed. Jill Bialosky and Helen Schulman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

⁶ Sandra Patton, *BirthMarks: Transracial Adoption in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 147. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁷ Joanne Martin and Elmer Martin, *The Helping Tradition in the Black Family and Community* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers, Inc., 1985), and *Social Work and the Black Experience* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Social Workers, Inc., 1995).

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Joanna Cole, *How I Was Adopted*, illustrated by Maxie Chambliss (New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1995).

Jamie Lee Curtis, *Tell Me Again about the Night I Was Born*, illustrated by Laura Cornell (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).

Marguerite Davol, *Black, White, Just Right!* illustrated by Irene Trivas (Morton

- Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman, 1993).
- Keiko Kasza, *A Mother for Choco* (New York: Putnam, 1992).
- Virginia Kroll, *Beginnings: How Families Come to Be*, illustrated by Stacey Schuett (Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman, 1994).
- Rose Lewis, *I Love You like Crazy Cakes*, illustrated by Jane Dyer (Boston: Little Brown, 2000).
- Ellen B. Senisi, writer and photographer, *For My Family, Love, Allie* (Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman, 1998).
- Valentina Pavlovna Wasson, *The Chosen Baby*, illustrated by Hildegarde Woodward, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1950).
- E. B. White, *Stuart Little*, illustrated by Garth Williams (New York: Harper Collins, 1945).

Recommended Books on Open and Transracial Adoption:

- Lynn C. Franklin, with Elizabeth Ferber, *May the Circle Be Unbroken: An Intimate Journey into the Heart of Adoption* (New York: Harmony Books, 1998).
- Lois Ruskai Melina and Sharon Kaplan Roszia, *The Open Adoption Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).
- Sandra Patton, *BirthMarks: Transracial Adoption in Contemporary America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
- Adam Pertman, *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution Is Transforming America* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).
- Kathleen Silber and Patricia Martinez Dorner, *Children of Open Adoption and Their Families* (San Antonio: Corona Publishing Co., 1990).
- Kathleen Silber and Phylis Speedlin, *Dear Birthmother: Thank You for Our Baby*, 3rd ed. (San Antonio: Corona Publishing Co., 1998).
- Rita Simon and Rhonda Roorda, *In Their Own Voices: Transracial Adoptees Tell Their Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall, *Inside Transracial Adoption* (Indianapolis: Perspectives Press, 2000).
- Mary Watkins and Susan Fisher, *Talking with Young Children about Adoption* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).