



**Rosh Hashanah 2006**

**Fifth Anniversary Memorial to the World Trade Center Tragedy**

**"Baby Lust" by Janice Eidus**

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For the past few years, John and I have been agonizing over whether or not to have a child.

Our lives are full. For most of our marriage, we've been happy with our decision to be child-free. We've been oblivious to the charms of squalling infants and overly precocious toddlers; we've vastly preferred our cats. So why, about four years ago, did I begin yearning for a child?

I don't know. But I do know that I've tried very hard to talk myself out of these yearnings. They're "trite," I tell myself, and "foolishly romantic." After all, my friends with children are no happier than I; some of them are far less happy, feeling trapped in loveless marriages. One friend with two small girls, widowed young, is chronically in mourning. Another, once an up-and-coming visual artist, has put his career on hold for almost 15 years, working as a businessman to put his two boys through private schools. Another has a son who's a heroin addict.

But my yearnings won't go away: I spend many sessions discussing them with my therapist. She (a mother and grandmother herself) doesn't want to "discourage" me, but she wants me "to be realistic." "You'll have far less time to write than you do now," she says, "and you already complain about not having enough time. And you'll be utterly exhausted." Relentless, she continues. "It will probably be difficult for you to get pregnant. You may have to adopt. "And," she says, at last truly frightening me, "nothing puts more strain on a marriage than having children. Your relationship with John will radically change."

So we agree to put the idea of having a child to bed.

But the reality is this: I still feel "baby lust" whenever I pass a mother or nanny out with a little one. If the baby is laughing and cooing, my envy level reaches stratospheric heights. When a baby cries anywhere in my vicinity -- on the bus or subway, at a nearby table in a coffee shop -- I have to stifle the urge to rise and gather her up in my arms.

And then on the morning of 9-11-2001, at a little after nine o'clock, I find myself standing out on Sixth Avenue in the West Village, a few blocks from my apartment, just a couple of miles from the World Trade Center, close enough to feel that I can reach out and touch the flames. I watch as the second plane hits, watch as the buildings burn and disintegrate, crumbling like cigarettes.

From 10:30 that morning, and for the next few weeks, John and his colleagues at St. Vincent's work 24-7 administering desperately needed crisis assistance to all those who descend upon the hospital (soon to be known as the "Ground Zero hospital"): the 6,000 family members and friends seeking news of their loved ones; the shellshocked lucky ones who somehow managed to escape; firefighters and police. (And even now as I write these words four months later, he and his staff are still working overtime helping those in need: small schoolchildren who witnessed bodies falling from the sky; families now in deep mourning; residents displaced from their homes; and so many more of the psychologically wounded).

So I spend the rest of 9-11 (and the next few days) with my friend Jaime who lives a few blocks away from me. For hours, he and I sit side by side in my living room, grasping each other's hands as we watch CNN with disbelief. Then we head outside to buy supplies, food, and clothing from the few stores in our neighborhood that are open. We walk a few blocks west to the temporary morgue that's been set up, where donations are being accepted for workers at Ground Zero.

And throughout all this, even as I stand on line at the morgue, even as I experience a kind of sorrow I never could have imagined I would feel in my lifetime, I can't stop envisioning myself with a child -- with my child -- by my side, my child whom I will nurture, comfort, mentor, love, and protect, who will inspire me to work harder to make the world a safer and better place, a world in which such a terrible thing won't happen again.

I hand over the coffee and bagels, heavy socks, flashlights, and batteries that Jaime and I have brought to the morgue, and I promise myself that when things have settled down a bit, when John and I can open our apartment windows without breathing in thick, overwhelmingly putrid smoke, when the National Guard ceases patrolling our block, when he and I can walk freely in our neighborhood without having to show I.D., when he at last has a free evening in which to begin to relax and unwind, I will tell him as gently as possible that the subject of our becoming parents hasn't been put to bed, after all. And I feel hopeful -- confident, actually -- as I begin to retrace my steps home from the morgue -- that now he will feel the same way.