

The Nesting Loon

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When we finally met her in the lobby of our hotel, I was crying so hard that I couldn't even focus. Our daughter loves to hear how we skipped the part where all the parents hang around to admire their own and others' babies, and instead I grabbed her under my arm like a football and raced back to our room. I would describe myself as impatient under the best of circumstances, but my 2-year wait for Mei Li made impatience one of my core competencies, along with anxiety, despair, agitation and paranoia. Not only was I a bit long in the tooth, but I convinced myself that even those who had neither the desire nor the paperwork would be blessed with a child -- except me. I would be denied my heart because it had to be obvious to everyone that I wasn't mother material. I wasn't the kind of woman who stopped to coo at every baby, who loved all children and felt a rush of maternal tenderness at their appearance—I thought far too many of them were no-neck monsters who sucked up their parents' time, energy and disposable income. In fact, I had never had any desire for children until I met John (who once told my mother that after our initial introduction, I basically said, "I'm Susan, and I want to have your children").

Although we decided on her name four months into the wait, I did not buy anything for her: no clothes, no toys, no crib, no music, no books (although I did break down and buy *The Owl and the Pussycat* a few months before bringing her home). Why bother – she would never come home to me. She would go to one of those mothers you read about who is not only musical and artistic and able to host perfect tea parties, but is also the earth mother, who makes you feel as if you've known her all your life upon first meeting her in her cozy kitchen where all the

neighborhood mothers and children gather to bask in her glow and eat her homemade cookies. That mother would be waiting calmly, humming while she embroidered sheets, curtains and mother-daughter outfits. She would perfect her Mandarin during the wait. She would be recording lullabies she wrote to soothe her little one to sleep. She would be worried only that she wouldn't be able to finish hand-carving the rocking chair and cradle, blocks, and matching chess and checkerboard set. She made me look like Medea, except I didn't dress as well. Among my worries in case a miracle happened and we did bring her home, were, in no special order: she won't like us, we won't like her, she'll be ugly, I won't be able to really love her and vice versa, she'll cry all the time and I'll discover that I don't want to be a mother and then it's too late and I'm stuck with her, I'm WAY too old, we don't have enough money and she'll end up working at King McTaco the rest of her life because we can't afford college for her, I was going to have to return to work and what's the point of flying across the Big Pond to bring home a baby and then abandon her to strangers at day care, we'll both lose our jobs and be homeless. And these don't include the really crazy ones.

I joined an online group for waiting parents, and although it gave me great comfort, it also fueled my madness in many respects: I took every rumor to heart and would call our agency and demand to know to know why they hadn't told me that China had stopped all adoptions for women in Arkansas or that the wait had changed from an average of one year to 12. I think now how they must have snorted and rolled their eyes at others in the office, mouthing "It's HER" as they patiently (but with no success) tried to soothe my last raw nerve. I wanted to scream and run headfirst into a brick wall when they told me that when the time was right, I would become the mother of the baby who was meant to be mine – it was all part of God's divine plan. Yeah, right. And then, the strangest thing happened. As I chatted up our six month old daughter Mei Li in the

hotel room that first day, I realized that this baby (all 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds of her), had banished my malevolent emotional companions of the past year. The truth of this being part of God's divine plan immediately washed over me, although I didn't think in those terms until much later. At last, there were only three of us in the room (four if you count bliss). By the next day, John said that she didn't yet know we were her parents, but she had no doubt we were the best nannies she'd ever had. Now I'm the one who says essentially the same thing about God's divine plan to waiting parents, but I preface my remarks with, "I know you will want to smack me for saying this and will probably find no comfort in it now, but you must believe me...."

My friend Kristy, extraordinary friend, sage, counselor and godmother to my children, copied me on this email she sent to our mutual friends, Nancy and Mark, in response to their dazed announcement that their heart and soul – a seven-month old baby girl -- was waiting for them in China:

Shopping, packing, fretting, shopping more, changing what you plan to pack... I still remember this from Mei Li's arrival. The funniest part is at absolute zero hour when it is time to complete the packing and head to the airport, Susan decides she has to shave and tan her legs. I finished her packing....she made herself beautiful for her new daughter. I guess that was her way of "nesting".

Neither John nor I remember the incident: it has been almost twelve years since that crucial leg-shaving. My overall memory is of a frenzied madness. I was consumed with thoughts—many of them deranged—of bringing home my baby. Among all the great pictures taken at the airport on our arrival home, one reflects perfectly my contentment: I am just coming off the plane, radiating happiness and preparing to hoist her up to our adoring crowd of relatives

and friends. I am still buzzing with excitement for Nancy and Mark, although something shocking has hit me: when the love of their life turns nine, mine will be 18 – a startling and unwelcome reminder of how close she is to leaving the nest I waited so long to create for her.