

Baby Hater

by Pia Ehrhardt

Babies get in my way. Babies interrupt everything good, like morning coffee and TV, a phone call you like, sleep, sex when you're finally not too tired to have it.

You leave your husband and go to the nursery at 2 a.m., painted so cute, go to them, and that's the only place you want to be, and there's no chance to leave, or trust they will be okay if you turn your back on them. They won't. SIDS. Meningitis. A blanket kicked off and now the air-conditioning vent's blowing right on them. They are babies. They need you.

Do you need them? What do they do for you? They fill you up like an ocean inside a balloon. It's too much water for one heart to hold.

They slow you down to just one worry when you are rocking them or watching them sleep that has nothing to do with you, your sick mother, your dead father, your out-of-work husband. The only worry is baby, baby, baby.

They sharpen your hearing so that you never again sleep without listening for the smallest hitch, for a nose that's gone crusty in the middle of the night, for the sigh from a dream that is probably about you, some criticism about something you did or didn't do for the baby, because you are in the baby's face all day, catching the baby's eyes with yours so you don't get lost, so the baby never worries about being separated. It has to be a dream about you because what else can be inside the head of someone that new? You would kick the ass of anyone who gave your baby a bad dream.

It's hard work being the baby's world, the baby's container. You were careful when you were pregnant, gave up coffee and wine, kept your voice down, played James Taylor CDs so that now you're bored with

him when you once loved him, even imagined yourself living with him on Martha's Vineyard after he finally kicked heroin, and you never want to hear Fire and Rain again.

Anyone can be awakened by a scream, but by a tiny fingernail scratching the tightly covered mattress? It's less of a sound than one bristle of a brush on a snare drum. It's the only sound you need in an entire, noisy, dumb world, and this clarity is enough to make you crazy, because your brain is stuffed with important things you all of a sudden don't care about anymore, and you empty out to love the baby as much as you can which is how much love the baby needs, and your life is ruined for anything but being a mother, being a prisoner of this baby's who will have to leave you and the safety of you, or turn into a vegetable, a wimp, a mama's boy.

It'll happen right in front of your eyes, and there'll be nothing you can do but pray (when you worriedly believe) that a car doesn't hit him while he's riding his bike, and hold other mother's babies and hate those women, too, for having babies, for not being able anymore to give you their full attention when you are giving them yours, because you have time, your baby is now twelve. You hate your pregnant sister because she's about to be taken up, suckered like you were by this unfair advantage whose small, soft head she will keep smelling, just once more, because this next baby reminds you of the baby you've lost out in the driveway shooting baskets, who if he ever comes back inside for dinner will smell like dirty coins.

