

THAT CHILD THING



Photo: Peter Higdon

ROBIN PACIFIC

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A FEW weeks before my daughter was born,
the midwife said:

“ALWAYS remember, the day of the birth is
just the first day in a lifetime of separations.”



Photo: Sc











Photos: Schuster Gindin



AS a child, unlike any other woman I have known, I never fantasized about having children. My own brilliant and gifted mother hated being a housewife and mother, and never let us forget it. I must have drunk in antipathy to traditional women's roles as an infant. It's not that I decided not to have children – the subject just never arose in my mind.

SO it's odd that a few months before I (accidentally) got pregnant, I made a series of drawings about the moon.

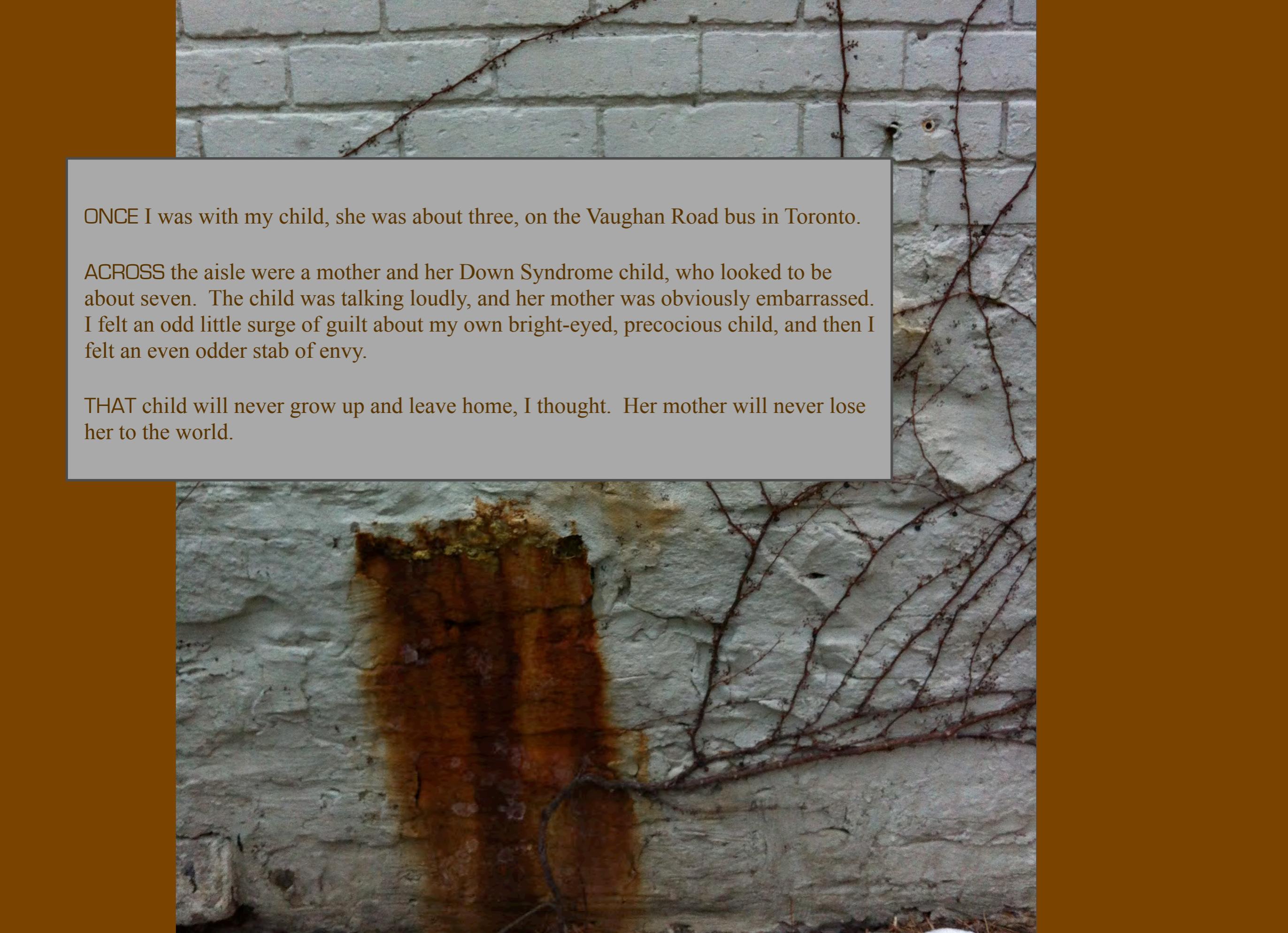




WHEN I was about three months pregnant, my partner came home and found me sitting on the piano bench crying. What's wrong, he asked.

I REALLY, really want to have a baby, I sobbed.

WELL that's a good thing, he said drily, because you're going to have one!



ONCE I was with my child, she was about three, on the Vaughan Road bus in Toronto.

ACROSS the aisle were a mother and her Down Syndrome child, who looked to be about seven. The child was talking loudly, and her mother was obviously embarrassed. I felt an odd little surge of guilt about my own bright-eyed, precocious child, and then I felt an even odder stab of envy.

THAT child will never grow up and leave home, I thought. Her mother will never lose her to the world.

I'M at a party, chatting with people I'm meeting for the first time. I can feel the familiar creep of dread, because I know exactly what's coming. They're all retirees, talking about their children and grandchildren.

"WHAT about you, Robin, do you have any children?"

YES, one, a daughter. She's thirty-three.

WHERE does she live? Is she close by?

NO, she lives in -----.

OH, how nice, do you visit her often?

NOT as often as I'd like, of course! (laughing fondly)

IT'S taken years to craft this response, which is true, but intended to deceive. If people knew the truth, they'd think I was different, bad, *not normal*. That I'd done something horribly wrong, that I must be being punished for a reason. But secrets, however shameful, are corrosive. They eat away, bit by bit, year by year, at one's very soul.



SO here it is. Since my daughter left home at eighteen, with a few brief exceptions, she has chosen to have no contact with me. No phone calls, no e-mails, and certainly no letters. She has never given me a reason.

THE question you might be asking is the one, God knows, I've tormented myself with obsessively: was I a bad mother? Or, how bad a mother was I? I relived, countless times, every harsh word, every impatient gesture. I was not very emotionally stable in the years when I should have been devoted to making the world a safe place for her.

STILL, I got a lot of it right, and I've certainly known worse parents who've been rewarded with greater filial devotion.

I am dog-tired of my own remorse. Is there a statute of limitations for motherhood guilt?



I THINK of friends who have actually lost children, one to suicide, one in a boating accident. I think of how they must feel when the dreaded question comes up: Oh, do you have any children?

THEIR loss is not mine.

I AM grateful I had a child, grateful that she is alive, and, as far as I know, healthy, and living her life.

I WAS so angry at her for so long, angry at her and at myself.

CHRISTMAS, birthdays, Easter, Mother's Day: each marked a calendar of pain and bitterness.

EVERY year brought anguish that, like spring, renewed itself. Even close friends stopped asking after her.



THEN one day a very simple thought occurred to me. Whatever her reason, she wouldn't be doing this if she didn't have to, didn't need to. The one gift I can still give her as a mother is to accept her choice.

SHORTLY after that, I realized that I had forgiven her.

A FEW months ago I dreamt I was bringing my daughter home on a sleigh; she was about a year and a half old. The snow was very uneven, and I struggled to drag the sleigh over the bumps. I finally got home, and a man helped me carry it up the stairs. But when I turned around, it was empty, the baby had fallen out. I ran in terror up the street, praying that in her red snowsuit she would be visible in the snow.

WHEN I saw her, she was now about seven, standing chatting to a teenage friend.
Oh, there's my mom, she said, I've got to go home. See you!

AS we walked home, I kept telling her how sorry I was for losing her.
She wasn't wearing a coat or boots, and I promised to take her shopping the next day.

THEN I was home in bed, and she came and crawled in beside me, nestling in my arms.
I kissed the top of her head, and the sweetest, most pure feeling of love I have ever felt washed over me.

WHEN I woke up, I realized that I had finally forgiven myself.

with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26 If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish it?

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

34 ¶ Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

35 It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; *but* men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

CHAPTER 15

WHEN drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

3 ¶ And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

8 ¶ Either what woman having ten

pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

11 ¶ And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

Luke 15:11-24

11 And he said, A certain woman had one daughter:

12 And the daughter said to her mother, Mother, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And she divided unto her her living.

13 And not many days after the daughter gathered all together, and took her journey into a far country, and there wasted her substance with riotous living.

14 And when she had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and she began to be in want.

15 And she went and joined herself to a citizen of that country; and he sent her into his fields to feed swine.

16 And she would fain have filled her belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto her.¹⁷ And when she came to herself, she said, How many hired servants of my mother's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!¹⁸ I will arise and go to my mother, and will say unto her, Mother, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy daughter: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And she arose, and came to her mother. But when she was yet a great way off, her mother saw her, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on her neck, and kissed her.

21 And the daughter said unto her, Mother, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy daughter.

22 But the mother said to her servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on her; and put a ring on her hand, and shoes on her feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my daughter was dead, and is alive again; she was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Invocation to the Moon Goddess

Ishtar

Venus' Shrine

Great Goddess of Arabia

Many Breasted Mother of Mysteries

Sacred Stone

Queen of the Dust

Impression of Aphrodite

Mourning Aphrodite of Lebanon

Perfect Intelligence

Mistress of Turquoise

Mistress of the Field

Winged Moon

Goddess of Magic

All Dewy One

Kilili

Black Anu

Selene

Derketo

Shing Moo

Antea

Al-Uzza

Cybele

Green One

Irnini

Hecate the Dark

Artemis

Anahita

Dea Syria

Atargatis

Silver-Shining, Seed-

She of the Ten Thousand Names

Sender of Nocturnal Visions
Goddess of Untrammelled Sexual Love

