

Self-Portrait with Baby

You don't even have a baby, haven't wanted one for a decade. You did – not to hold but rather hold over them; the boys then sort-of-men you loved & wanted to keep. You wanted a good glue, the most lasting, to render them unable to forget or delete you. Eww, those now-men parking up, slamming doors, striding your private path now & again next Friday & the one after, one after another, to your cottage door, knocking on the stained-glass because they're still barbaric. You shiver, you must answer, pull your cardigan together, open your smart black door. Don't let them in, don't let them all the way in, but they're close enough already, up the step, past the welcome line on the welcome mat, trainer toe-cap, or sharp point of a smart shoe over the skirting, on, touching your scrubbed-up tiles. You pick the baby up from where she's been this whole time – on the bench under the window. How could you have missed her? Curled cute as a prawn in her pink brushed cotton, blurry face, real hands, a hat – as if she comes with a carrier, a seat for a car you don't have & can't drive. The baby is yours. You know it like hunger, water – *Hi*, he says to his watch, ostentatious as ever, then reaches out, *I'll bring her back Monday*. You're weak, but lift the carrier, your baby, your girl & hand her over to him. Or to him. Or the other. They knock, one after the other, to collect & collect your babies which they say are also theirs; your babies together. *It's only fair*, there were agreements you can't break, you mustn't break, so you hand them over & over the threshold, and she goes, each time, she goes.