

The Family Tradition

by Angela Brett

Your father, his father, and his before that,
Your mother, her mother, and all the way back
Have kept a tradition by chance or by will
To each have a baby (or several) until
The flame's passed to you, but now you have a choice
So don't join the choir till you find your own voice.
Creating a person's a huge thing to try;
You can if you want, but first think about why:
 Not to continue this age-old tradition
Not to be sure that your life has a mission
Not for a god or a country or norm, oh
Not for a lark, or the whim of a hormone
Not for a vague or instinctive desire
Not just to copy the folks you admire
Not out of fear you'll leave nothing behind
(Not that your DNA outdoes your mind)
Not 'cause you're bright so you should spread your genes
Not 'cause you're dim and don't know what that means
Not to rebel against Mum and Dad's view
Not because they want their vengeance on you
Not as a snake oil to quiet your fears
That you might feel a twinge of regret in ten years
Not when your body clock's ticking through dates
And you're always a sucker for 'Buy now! Don't wait!'
Not because well-behaved babes tug your heart
Not so your parents can relive that part
Not 'cause your partner would like to have some
Not 'cause you're grateful that Dad convinced Mum
Not 'cause you've thought of a name you must give
Or things you'd do better if you could relive
Not when a thoughtless mistake involved sex

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Not 'cause you're married and that's what comes next
Not because all of your friends ask why not
Not because they're doing well with their lot
Not 'cause you're told that it's selfish to live
without making a beggar to whom you can give
Not because parents say nothing else matters
Not to add glue to a romance in tatters
Not because children learn more tricks than cats
Not to prove *your* kids would never be brats
Not so your welfare amount will be goin' up
Not 'cause you think it'll make you a grownup
Not so they'll pay for your food in old age
(for pyramid schemes have to collapse at some stage)
Not to fulfil a perceived need for love
Not if you're not sure, when push comes to shove
Not 'cause you read this and thought, 'This'll show 'em!'
Not for the sentiment closing this poem.

But only because you adore helping youth
and can't think of life without living that truth.
You know that their life-long love's not guaranteed
and you're yearning to face unconditional need
of a boy, girl or intersexed, well, sick or crippled
dunce, saint or murderer, one, twins or tripled.
You're deeply concerned the resources you borrow
may add to the hardship of grandkids tomorrow
and realise your efforts to curb your consumption
are more than undone if you make the assumption
that your kids survive and continue to breed
and their kids spawn ever more hungers to feed.
If raising a person is *your* lifelong dream,
and not just a gesture to race with the team
then go ahead, try to conceive, but know this:
it's not just a baby that's made in all this.
You remake yourself as you start your new quest,
as parent first up, and then some of the rest.

From baby's perspective you've made the whole world;
you've led them from nowhere to cosmos unfurled.
So enjoy your big bang and enjoy your inflation,
And cherish your well-informed act of creation.

