

The House That Held Us - By Melissa Malivoire

The sunlight filtered through the curtains at Hummingbird House that afternoon, as if the world outside had paused as well. For the first time, I was no longer his visitor. I was simply his mum.

It was quiet in the house. Not the stale silence of my hospital room, but something softer, gentler, and more deliberate.

We held him. We tucked him into blankets we had been gifted. It was the only place in the world where time slowed enough for us to know him.

I spent a lot of time alone in the hospital while he was still inside me. I wasn't lonely, though, because I always had him. He kicked and rolled, keeping me company. Despite the isolation and anxiety around me, I felt wildly calm, positive, and sometimes even joyful. He kept me sane.

I've always been his mother, long before he was born. Years before I fell pregnant, a psychic-medium had gently prepared me for loss, speaking of a boy whose soul would stay young.

I'd forgotten all about it until after he died, when I found the recording and the conversation came flooding back. Was this destiny, or simply the way motherhood had always been written for me?

Even in the uncertainty, I found hope in the data, the passing weeks, and the increasing chance he would be okay. I convinced myself that everything would eventually work out.

He arrived suddenly, and I was in a state of shock. Doctors rushed around me, whisking him away instantly. I begged his dad to follow him. My body surged with a desperate need to protect him – a visceral ache unlike anything I'd ever known.

Motherhood began behind plastic incubator walls, in gowns, masks, and gloves, with constant, hope-filled monitoring of machines. I mothered through one finger touching him, expressing milk he couldn't yet drink, changing nappies under supervision. I longed for closeness, for a cuddle, but he wasn't stable enough. I kept convincing myself it was for the best.

The first time I truly held him was the day he died. His skin was soft and warm, and his body was impossibly small. When they said, "There is no heartbeat"; I wailed. My body physically recoiled. My uterus cramped, my breasts stung – every part of me protested. The pain was overwhelming, torturous.

Fast forward through the trauma of staying in the hospital with our dead baby to our time at Hummingbird House – it felt surreal, like we were children playing mums and

dads, waiting for the doll to cry, knowing it never would. He lay on ice packs that needed to be changed every few hours. The job felt maternal, intimate, and an honour despite its sorrow. I dressed him, adjusted his blankets, held his cool hands, traced his tiny feet, and loved every bit of him.

Family came, bearing witness to a grief they couldn't fathom, experiencing their loss through ours. I guarded my pain, protected it, kept it slightly distanced even from those I loved most.

Handing him over to the ladies from the funeral home was debilitating. I'll never forget placing him in the cane basket and watching them walk with it to their car. Grief was physical, aching in places he should still have been. My breasts, my heart, my womb — all felt hollowed out. At times, I was delirious, numb, reckless, desperate to run from reality.

Grief became stages, a journey of contradictions. I needed a distraction, yet I was consumed by emptiness. I wanted another child, not to replace him, but because motherhood had been taken from me too soon. I craved connection and found solace in advocacy. Falling pregnant again brought hope mixed with fear, love layered with anxiety. Mothering his sister was beautiful but complicated, filled with echoes of him, postpartum depression, and overwhelming love.

He remains present. His urn travels with us. His photos surround us. His sister interacts with him, and he's celebrated openly. My grief is integrated now – carried gently, sometimes heavily, but always with purpose. My work, my advocacy – everything I do is his legacy. Home is for his sister, but my voice is forever his.

His sister calls me “mum-ma”, and in those syllables I hear the whispers of a boy whose voice I never knew, but whose spirit I will always mother.

He taught me motherhood's hardest lesson: loving fiercely means accepting loss as part of love's story.

Now, though I mother him from afar, he is everywhere, in everything – never truly gone, always deeply loved.