So, you want to know how I feel about your moving me from one family to another?
May I tell you what it is like, way down here, inside of me, to be so very special —
so special that I must lose everything that is familiar to me?
So special that a great many big people are talking about me
and looking at me and pointing at me and looking away from me and crying near me
so much that I am losing my own sense of who I am and where I belong
and what I am supposed to do to keep myself safe.

When you look at me
I wonder if you know that I am really here?
Do you understand that I am watching?
So you understand that all of the papers you are signing, all of the decisions you are making, all of the ways you are behaving are noticed by me, that I am affected by all of it, and that I won’t forget?
Thank you for noticing that I am not simply a hunk of ham lying here —
a beautiful hunk of ham, to be sure, and undoubtedly very precious and beautiful to behold and much wanted by all and really quite “special” and all that — but a hunk of ham nonetheless.

Thank you for imagining (I know this is hard for you) that I am something else.
I am not something with a language, but you had better know that I have some things to say and I will find a way to say them.
I am something very different from you, but not necessarily less than you.
And so I hope that you will not focus your feelings and your thoughts for my feelings and my thoughts.
And I really so thank you for asking.
First of all, if you are going to do this thing, if you are going to have me go through this great, huge change, then please let my birth mother and my birth father be sure. The last thing this world needs is another Baby Jessica or Baby Richard mess. (I knew about both of them. Who finally won there?) Make sure everybody gets a chance to say what they really want. Make sure everybody gets a chance to know what they really want. Make sure they get a chance to see me. Don’t play that hide-and-seek game, where everybody pretends that if you keep my birth mother and my birth father from looking at me, they will go away, they will be able to forget and they won’t cause any trouble.

Second, give my new mother and my new father — my adoptive parents — a chance to be pregnant for me. Let them know me while I am still inside my birth mother. Let them learn about whether my birth father likes his pancakes crispy or fluffy, and what my birth mother’s favorite sport is, and what both of them thought about me. So these new people can know me better when I come out. And so they can help me know better too.

It would be best if you could go through most of this process of bringing me into the world together. Then we might all feel so connected that the grownups could concentrate on what is best for me. Not on their own loss. Or their own fear of loss.

Remember, it helps me if my new parents can get relaxed, so they don’t act funny around me — either not letting themselves have too many feelings for me, or having feelings that drown me.

Don’t any of you forget: I am really not something you can own. It doesn’t feel good at all to me for you to fight over me. My voice is so small, even to me, when you forget all about me and start treating me like a thing — a thing to be negotiated over, a thing to possess, a thing that causes perfectly sane grownups to act like jealous and mean little children. (Did I mention before that the last thing the world needs is another Baby Jessica or Baby Richard mess?)

Third — and this works only if you were paying attention to what I said the first and second things were — notice what you are doing, and when you hand me from one to the other, have some kind of a ritual or something that will make all of you feel like this thing is real, and permanent, and so you will never forget it for the rest of your lives.

But also so that you will remember why you are doing this, this ritual thing doesn’t have to be somber, unless that is what all of you really think you need. It could be also joyful. It seems as if it ought to be joyful: After all, if you are not extremely happy about this huge thing you are doing, then why are you doing it? I am not asking you to pretend. (Although pretending is not such a bad thing to do around a little baby, who sometimes gets very confused watching all of your faces and trying to figure what they mean and whether you are all right and whether I am all right.) But what I am asking you to do is to make the giving of me from one of you to the other a Very Official Thing, because I don’t want you to go back on it later. That would hurt me a lot. (I can’t believe I am having to tell you this.) And I am asking you all to show honor and love for each other.

Finally, please don’t ask me to pretend that I love one of you more than the other. Don’t ask me to forget my birth mother or my birth father. Don’t ask me to think of my adoptive parents as anything less than my real parents.

Don’t ask me to not talk about things because they make you feel uncomfortable. For crying out loud, we were all there. We all know what happened. So how about we pry this thing open and act a little more like all of us are in it together?

There are some things you need to just let happen: Sometimes I will have the weirdest flashes of what it feels like to move around inside my birth mother. Sometimes I will miss that. Sometimes I will wonder why you, my new parents, don’t smell or look or taste or act or feel like the people I grew up with (for the first nine or ten months of my life). Some days I won’t remember my birth mother at all. That doesn’t mean I am disloyal. It just means I have got other fish to fry.

Actually, I wish that none of you would ever expect me to prove my loyalty to you. That is really not my job. It is your job — all of you — to pull yourselves together so that you feel okay about yourselves and you don’t have to get me to work it out for you. I can’t fill up that part of you that is empty, or scared, or lonely, or feels like you might lose me.

(Actually, I probably could do some of those things, but I really don’t want to. And it is not my job) Please fill your own holes so you can help me be whole.

If you want to know what I am feeling — or whether I am feeling — ask me.
See how I am sleeping.
What, and how, am I eating.
Do I look at you?
Do I let you cuddle me?
Or do I protect myself from the pain of losing you
by never letting myself have you in the first place?

As I grow up, please try very hard to let me be
an everyday kid.
And don’t ever forget that I am not.
Forget all about where I came from.
But don’t ever forget where I came from.
(This is a tall order, isn’t it?)

Remember that if I see you —
my adoptive parents who now
feel like my real parents —fighting,
I am pretty likely to freak out.
After all, splits of any kind are a little bit
too familiar to me.

I may do some weird stuff like climbing inside your pajamas,
or only wanting to watch TV in that mummy
sleeping bag you are going to give me for my fourth birthday,
even rolling myself up in rugs
and having you lie on top of me.
Because part of me really wishes that you could birth me,
or I could sort of be born in you.
(See what I mean about how you can’t really ever
forget that I’m not an everyday kid?
And that I still want you to?)

And I might take some things from your dresser when I am
six,
and you might start to think I am a terrible thief.
Because I am adopted.
Because I have terrible genes from somewhere back there.
Remember: the biggest thing in my life
is to figure out how to make connections stick.
And sometimes the way I know how to do that is to hold onto
things
that belong to people I care about.
I don’t mean to steal from you.
I mean to take you with me.

So, that’s about it.
You asked me to tell you how it looks from down here
when you move me from one family to another.

I think you really meant it
when you asked me how all of you could do it just right for
me.
I want to tell you one more time that I’m glad you asked,
and I hope you won’t be ticked off
when I tell you that is about freakin’ time that you asked.
I know you all mean well. You probably always did.
But you haven’t always acted so smart, and you have often
acted
as if I were not even here...and watching.
I’ll take your having asked about this
as a sign that things are going to change for me and
all of my brothers and sister adoptees.
Thank you for your courage and your unselfishness.

I’ll be seeing you around.
Forever.