

Amazingly, the apartment feels fuller with less in it. Maybe that's because now it's a HOME. It's the FUTURE. The only furniture I have is what I brought into the union: a dinette set with only three chairs that don't match the table or each other. Well, that and the futon mattress that Kit has so graciously given me to use as a bed. The bare walls envelop me in an embrace warmer than when they were cocooned in David's photographs. I reach in amusement to touch the light rectangle where my botched attempt at knitting used to hang, wondering if he took it because in his haste, he lost track of what belonged to who, or because it had started out as a gift for him. Does it have sentimental value to him? If that's the case, it's because of who created it, and then he would've stayed, right?

It doesn't matter. Everything I need, everything that *does* matter, is in this apartment.

Glory opens her eyes, Jay's eyes, and peers myopically at me. I hold my breath, waiting to see if she'll cry. But she just blinks lazily at me a few times as if to say, *You know what I want. Do I need to spell it out?*

Breastfeeding is still a bit awkward, but after a few failed attempts, she latches on. I rest my back against a bare wall, legs splayed on the futon mattress, while my daughter has breakfast. *My daughter.* The phrase feels foreign and perfect at the same time.

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*Motherhood had never been part of the plan, so when I met David, who didn't want kids, either, it seemed perfect. It wasn't until just recently that I*

*realized how vastly different our reasons were. There was a time that I would've thought that our motives didn't matter, as long as the end game was the same.*

*How wrong I was.*

*A foster kid since the age of three, I never knew what a real family was. David, on the other hand, had grown up in a two-parent household with a brother, a sister, and a dog. It was an affluent family, due to the marriage of his heiress mother to his plastic surgeon father. They seemed to have everything I'd ever dreamed of, and I'd told him as much on our third or fourth date.*

*"It's all a lie," he'd said, helping himself to some of my pad Thai.*

*"What do you mean?"*

*"Our 'perfect' life. Everyone in my family is selfish."*

*At the time, I didn't stop to think that that included him.*

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*It's becoming harder and harder to keep my eyes open. I haven't had much sleep this past week, or the past few months, for that matter. Still, knowing that someone is completely dependent on me is my new form of adrenaline, and I stay awake because she needs me to.*

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*The state of the apartment when I arrived home suggested that his decision to leave was an impulse. This shouldn't surprise me, since I was also one of David's impulsive decisions.*

*"Let's get married," he said to me one day as we rode the subway home from grocery shopping.*

*"Seriously?" We'd only been dating for three months, living together for six weeks.*

*"Seriously."*

*And so, the next week, we were husband and wife. We were kindred spirits, he said. We both loved indie films and cats and eating breakfast for dinner. My dark hair and eyes were the perfect complement to his blonde and blue. I'd always been poor, and he evaded his family's wealth.*

*It was meant to be.*

*Maybe he'd truly believed it at the time that the words had cascaded from his lips. Or maybe it had been nothing more than the level of enthusiasm he'd initially shown for his myriad abandoned hobbies: the guitar, pottery, painting, photography. When he was there, it was almost impossible to walk from one end of our home to the other without tripping over some forgotten, half-completed project of his. My right forearm will forever bear a scar from that attempt at glass-blowing that had wound up broken and shoved out of sight, just waiting for some unsuspecting someone to root around blindly under the bed in search of a misplaced shoe. And one wall of the kitchen displays the appalling aftermath of his fascination with sponge painting.*

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Glory has drifted off mid-breakfast. I still sit her up, cradling her impossibly small upper half in one hand while I rub her back with the other. She emits a satisfying little burp, still asleep, eyes shut as tight as her tiny fists.

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*For David, the novelty of poverty got old pretty quickly. We had been married for eight months, and his ever-dwindling savings made it apparent that if he wanted to just be broke and not flat broke, then changes would have to be made.*

*I had just gotten home from a double shift at the gas station when he walked into the bedroom, flopped across the bed, and announced: "We're out of cereal."*

*"No we're not," I replied, pulling my smelly uniform polo shirt over my head. "I bought some yesterday."*

*"We're out of my cereal."*

*"I bought your cereal."*

*"No, you bought the generic stuff," he countered, face down on the mattress. His words, though muffled, were no less maddening. "I can't eat that crap – it has a weird aftertaste."*

*"The name brand is three dollars more for a smaller box," I explained, "and that was three dollars that had to go to the electric bill so our power wouldn't get shut off." My sweaty bra followed the shirt in the dirty clothes hamper, which was overflowing. "Think about that the next time you want to keep the lights on all day." I turned sideways to sidle past his feet, which were blocking my way to the door. "I'm taking a shower."*

*I wasn't sure, exactly, what he mumbled as I exited the room, but it sounded suspiciously like "This sucks."*

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Both Glory and I are asleep when Kit stops by. She apologizes profusely for showing up unannounced. I'm nearly dead on my feet, but I'm so happy to not be alone with the baby that I insist it's not a problem. Some parenting books say that you should rest when the baby does; others insist that that's the time to tend to your own needs. I'm not certain which policy I'll officially adopt, but I'm leaning toward the former.

Kit is the closest I've ever had to a sister. She and I had been placed in the same foster home on three different occasions. The total of six years we'd lived together means that I have lived with her longer than with anyone else.

"How are you?" she asks, taking Glory in an expert hold. Kit has two of her own.

"Terrified." I can be completely honest with her.

She offers me a smile that is three parts encouragement, one part pity. "It'll get better."

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*"We have something really important to talk to you about."*

*Eric, another product of the foster system, had invited me to dinner at a restaurant I'd never be able to afford on my own. He was the exception to the rule, a crack baby and ward of the state that had grown up to be extremely successful. Jay, his partner in business and in life, had come along as well. His presence was a surprise, but not necessarily an unpleasant one.*

*"What is it?" I asked, pretending that it wasn't my first time trying lamb. Just for one night, I wanted to be free to pretend: I was someone important, with tons of money, who ate at restaurants like that every day. I was someone who had a personal shopper and never had to wash dishes and used champagne to water my plants.*

*The guys exchanged glances. "We've decided to have a baby."*

*"That's great!" The lamb was delicious – juicy and succulent and more flavorful than I'd imagined. But Jay's next words made that piece of meat sour in my stomach.*

*"We'd like for you to be our surrogate."*

*The rest of the conversation is kind of a blur. I remember alternating between being touched that they'd chosen me for such an awesome responsibility, and offended because the expensive dinner seemed like a bribe. Eric and Jay had everything worked out logistically, down to visitation, should I want it, and how my existence would be explained to the child when he or she was old enough. "I know this is a lot to ask," Eric said when they dropped me off at my apartment that evening. "Just promise me you'll at least think about it."*

*"Please," Jay added before I headed inside.*

*I waited until the next day to present the proposition to David. I was uncertain of how he would react, or even how I was hoping he would react. His face remained expressionless until I got to the part about what was in it for me: besides supporting me financially during the pregnancy and covering all of the medical bills, Eric and Jay were offering me one hundred thousand dollars.*

*"That's crazy, though, right?" I concluded. "I mean, I don't want to feel like I'm selling a baby."*

*"Jess." There was an almost maniacal gleam in David's eyes. "What we'd be doing for them is providing an invaluable service. How can you put a price on that?" But then he did exactly that: "If you ask me, one hundred thousand is too low; they should've offered us at least two fifty."*

Us?

*"Who else have they asked?" he wanted to know.*

*"No one else," I answered, feeling numb. "There's no one that they trust with this."*

*"All the more reason to ask for more money. You're a hot commodity."*

*I couldn't believe my ears. "I'm not asking for more, David. I'd do this for Eric for free."*

*My husband looked horrified and disgusted. "Don't be stupid. You need to learn how to negotiate."*

*"So you'd be okay if I did it?" I asked, not sure how I felt about his willingness to comply. Eric had been right – it was a lot to ask of me. There could be complications, for me or the baby or both of us. My body would never be the same after I carried a child. I would never be the same.*

*"Of course," David replied, smoothly switching gears. "You always say that Eric's like a brother to you."*

*He was like a brother. Before David came along, Eric was the only steady man in my life. And giving him the gift of a child, a child that would be wanted*

*and loved and would have a permanent home, just felt right. It meant so much more to us – Eric and me – than it would to the average person.*

*And as loathe as I was to admit it, the money would help out more than Jay and Eric could imagine. I could quit the job at the gas station, go to school, make something of myself.*

*And so I said yes.*

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Kit grabs me by the shoulders and steers me toward the bedroom.

"Sleep," she commands. "I've got the baby."

When I wake up, the sun has set and the smell of spaghetti sauce wafts in from the kitchen. "Have you been eating?" Kit asks when I emerge, rubbing my grainy eyes. She's holding my daughter with one arm while stirring the contents of a pot with her free hand.

"Not exactly," I admit sheepishly.

"You have to eat to produce enough milk for Glory," she says, knowing that's the one argument that can't be trumped. I sit down and she serves me spaghetti and meatballs, salad, and garlic bread.

"Mike says he saw David yesterday," she says casually after placing Glory in her carrier and joining me at my mismatched dining set.

"He did? Where?" Our husbands aren't exactly good friends. In fact, David doesn't really care for *any* of my friends or their mates, claiming they're all trash. *Then so am I.*

She shrugs. "On the street."



I narrow my eyes at her. "What aren't you telling me?"

She stuffs a piece of garlic bread in her mouth, a blatant stall tactic. "He was driving a Beamer. With temporary plates."

I know what this means: not only has he gone back to the family and the lifestyle he supposedly despises, but he's been welcomed with open arms. I can't possibly compete with that, and strangely, I feel not despair but relief.

Wow. My marriage is over.

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*I couldn't understand the girl on the phone. At first, I thought there was an issue with interference or background noise, but then I realized she was crying. Weeping, actually. And until she spoke, I, for some odd reason, assumed the call was for David.*

*"J-J-Jessica?"*

*"Yes, who's calling?"*

*"M-My name is Leslie. Leslie Rinella."*

*I straightened up, my hand reflexively resting on my swollen belly. The baby, a girl that the guys were planning to name Glory, immediately responded with an eerily accurate kick against my hand. Rinella was Jay's last name; this was his sister who had called me.*

*"What is it? What's wrong?"*

*"There's been an accident," she managed to tell me between sobs. "A terrible car accident. It-It was fatal."*

*"Oh my god." My knees buckled and I fell to a seated position on the edge of the ottoman. At seven months pregnant, I'd normally have to strategize and go through a lot of maneuvering to sit that way, but in my state of profound sorrow, my awkward body performed almost gracefully. "He's gone then? Jay's gone?"*

*"Y-Yes!" This admission renewed Leslie's tears.*

*"Has anyone told Eric?" I asked when she stopped to catch her breath.*

*"Oh Jessica, you don't understand...they were both in the car. Eric's gone, too."*

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Kit hugs me carefully, mindful of my engorged breasts. "Do you want me to go with you tomorrow?"

I shake my head, afraid that I'll start crying if I attempt to speak. I'm overwhelmed by her kindness and concern.

"You'll call me afterward, right?"

I nod against her shoulder.

"Don't forget to eat," she reminds me as she slips out the door.

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*If this was a soap opera, the news I'd received from Jay's sister would have sent me into instant labor. Instead, I hung up the phone and cleaned the entire apartment. Only after I made sure that every baseboard and lightbulb was dusted did I allow myself to go stand by the window that looked down onto the street so that I could cry. The tears wouldn't come, though, and I numbly*

*watched the foot traffic until David got home from his latest endeavor. I couldn't even remember what he was up to – maybe harp lessons.*

*"What's wrong with you?" he asked when he saw my face.*

*Knowing he'd be annoyed if I beat around the bush, I delivered the bad news as succinctly as I could. He stared at me for a long time, mute.*

*"Say something," I finally implored after two full minutes of silence.*

*"You're not still planning on having the baby, are you?"*

*Then it was my turn to stare. I couldn't find the right words to..there just were no words.*

*"I mean, you can get rid of it, right?"*

*"David, I'm thirty weeks along. I kind of don't have a choice."*

*He suddenly threw his keys at the wall. They struck one of his hideous paintings, leaving a fan-shaped spray of tick marks on the canvas. "Shit!" he screamed. "Shit shit SHIT!"*

*"David, calm down."*

*"Calm down? CALM DOWN?!" He ran his hands through his hair. "We're fucked here – absolutely fucked – and you want me to calm down?! We're out a hundred grand!" He began to pace wildly, describing frantic circles in our living room. "I knew we should've had papers drawn up. I knew we should've demanded the money up front. God DAMMIT!" He was panting now, chest heaving. "This was too good to be true; why do I always get the short end of the stick?"*

*My blood was boiling, and the baby squirmed. "Think about how Jay's family feels right now," I said, "and all the people that care about Eric." Not to mention how I felt.*

*My husband shot me a look of pure contempt. "They didn't just get screwed over. They didn't just lose a ton of money."*

*I clamped my mouth shut. There would be no reasoning with him.*

*"So how does this work?" he asked, collapsing onto the same ottoman that I'd fallen onto earlier that day. "You can just hand the baby over and let Social Services find a family for it, right? You don't have to be involved with picking someone, do you?"*

*I hadn't thought about that, but maybe that's because it was a no-brainer for me. As inexperienced as I was, as unwilling as I'd been to have a child of my own, I couldn't give up the baby I was carrying. I'd known the moment that I'd heard of her father's demise that she was staying with me. "This is my baby," I said quietly. "I'm keeping her."*

*"No," he said immediately. "We're not having kids. You're giving it up."*

*"Her, not 'it.' And I can't do that to my child, David. I grew up in the system—"*

*"—and you turned out okay," he interrupted.*

*But had I turned out okay? I was married to a narcissist who had just asked me to abort a fetus at thirty weeks. To me, that was pretty not okay. Though his next words were of no surprise, "Jess, if you keep that baby, I'm out of here," I imagine I shocked him with my reply:*

*"I'm sorry to hear that."*

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Glory gurgles while I dress her for our meeting with Eric's attorney. Her lavender footie pajamas match the maternity dress I selected after discovering that my new body can't fit into my old clothes. She gets fidgety while my shaky hands fumble with the snaps. I realize I've misbuttoned them and have to start again, finishing right as she pushes a disgruntled wail out of her nine-day-old lungs.

I scoop her up and bounce her a bit until she quiets, then gather our things so we can head downstairs to the taxi that's waiting for us.

I don't know what the future holds.

I don't know why the lawyer needs to talk to me about Eric's estate.

I'm nervous about taking the baby outside for the first time.

But I know that no matter what happens, we'll make it, Glory and I.

We're survivors.