

Living the Life of Ryan

She smells so fucking good. It knocks him silly every single shift, just walking past her cube or those moments—oh, those moments—she wheels a chair beside Ryan’s chair and helps him through whichever computer problems the day might bring (with the incessant upgrading of technology systems, the roles of supervisor and subordinate are frequently reversed at Ryan’s place of work). He wants to kiss her then. He wants to lock eyes and lean in and kiss her gently, caress that twenty-four-year-old cheek. And he could. He thinks so at least. He feels it. You know this. Or think you do. At forty-four you do, more precisely than you used to. The faces they make, the shy smiles, and . . . something else, something . . . indescribable. Yep, he could have her. Maybe not, though, down the road; around the corner is more like it. In ten years he’d be Richie Breslin’s age. Richie Breslin looks a thousand, like he’s just been pulled from a pile of rubble. A face like a glazed ham. Richie “used to” do things well, “used to” have this or be that. He’ll say this, Richie. I used to bomb it two-fifty off the tee. I used to date an Eagles cheerleader. I used to have a head of hair like Emilio Estevez. Richie is Ryan’s playing partner in the twilight-autumn league over at the public golf course. They picked from a hat and Ryan got paired with Richie. Wednesdays and Fridays they play. Nine holes or till the sunlight allows. Ryan sees Richie, he thinks, more than he does his wife or son or any other person in his life these past few months. Richie Incognito is what the guys at the course call him. He wears a pair of dark shades (sunshine or not) and a big straw hat so the “workman’s comparazzi” can’t take clear photos. Richie’s what the young girls—all girls—might call a creep, a creeper. Ryan could hear it, hear the girls—the beer cart girls, the bartender at O’Houl’s—telling their husbands or boyfriends, saying some old creep was stalking them. Ryan often cringes watching Richie talk to

woman—to girls. Oblivious Richie. Fifty-fucking-four. If you still think you look young then, once you've entered your fifties, your lying to yourself, you've lied and lied all your life and now you're so damn good, at lying, you see a different face, a face that no one sees but you, when you stare across at your reflection. And Ryan's just six years from that, from fifty. But now, right now, at forty-four, Ryan could get this girl at work—he is certain. Taylor DeCristofaro.

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Ryan rocks the boy to sleep. His wife does the baths and Ryan does the rocking. This was the agreement. The boy grunts and flails. It often takes an hour or more before the boy is down in his crib and Ryan is down in his living room chair. His wife is there. Across a rug filled with bright botanical colors and coffee stains and dog hair, across the sea of toys their son barely touches, close enough that Ryan can see her roots of gray hair, she lies on the couch. She spends much of her time there lately. He's been tempted to call her Brian Wilson. Or Grandpa Joe from *Willy Wonka*. She wouldn't laugh, though, respond the way she used to. She watches people cook, Ryan's wife. *Beat Bobby Flay, Chopped, Diners, Drive-ins and Dives*. So does Ryan. They watch people eat, too. Ryan would rather watch *The Bachelor* or *Dancing with the Stars* or clips of puppies being shot dead. Because their bedroom and "the nursery" share a thin wall and because the man cave never came together once everything baby prep became priority, Ryan has nowhere else to watch TV. They watch and drink and snack; they play on their phones. This is what weeknights look like in their twin rancher with a water-stained vaulted ceiling that's on the longlist of things to fix. She lies there in her pajama pants and one of his T-shirts she's stretched beyond recovery. "Uhhh," or "Uhh" she'll sometimes mutter, sounds of hunger and wanting,

when they zoom in on food, or show a chef prepping and mixing, serving to judges. Her expressions then, her body language—the way she kind of narrows her eyes, shrugs her shoulders, moaning ever so slightly, while rubbing and pulling down her lower lip—it reminds Ryan of the days he'd mow the lawn without a shirt and she'd surprise him with a glass of cold iced tea, dragging fingers down his dripping torso while her eyes were explaining what would be coming later on that night. “Damn” she'd say, or “Fuck, do I want that!” Now it's some seasonal inspired pasta dish with pumpkin and sausage she wants; she seems to taste it just the way Guy Fieri does at the end of each episode. She loves Guy. She'll say this—“I love him”—almost every time he fist pumps the chef whose specialty he's just taste-tested. She says, “What middle-aged guy could get away with frosted tips—only this Guy!” He's the only guy who gets her to smile these days. Guy Fieri. She needs him, Guy—or Ree Drummond . . . or Ina Garten . . . or Molly Yey—in order to fall asleep at night—this she hasn't said but Ryan knows by now. She's often the first of them to fall asleep, his wife, right there on the couch, her phone resting on a belly that still seems pregnant two years after the baby's come, her hair in that rat's-nest bun he'd call “the fun bun” back when she'd do it up that way before it was time for sex. She snores, his wife. It started during the first pregnancy and hasn't stopped. He won't wake her tonight, or ever. He used to: she'd get angry—Why the hell'd you wake me up? She couldn't get back to sleep when woken up! Now he doesn't even cover her with an afghan, in fear of waking her. Now he simply locks the front door and clicks off the TV, he moves her half-empty glass of red or white over to the kitchen counter then heads for bed, hoping Schwarber, their bulldog, will be there waiting.

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Richie thinks Ryan's a real pussy when it comes to "this little tastycake at work." "Fucking fuck her—fuck her everywhere," he says as he steps up to the tee and addresses his ball. Richie wears a back brace, a big Velcro belt of sorts. A fall at work, collapsed scaffolding, ended his career as a glazier and ignited his life as a golfer and a poker player and a pollster (Richie never tees it up on Election Day) . . . and a market trader . . . and a Bitcoin and Crypto expert, things a full-time job was holding back a bachelor from truly being. To Ryan, Richie's golf swing—the way he wraps the shaft around his head, *way* over-the-top on the way down, his whole torso lifting up just before impact—calls to mind one of the all-time greats: Charles Barkley. And the second, the milo second, after his clubface comes in contact with the ball, Richie diagnoses why it didn't go where he wanted it to. He instantly knows he picked up his head or chicken-winged his elbow or hit it off the fucking heel. He calls the ball—or himself, it isn't always clear—a fucking bitch or a little cunt or a cock-sucker mother fucker. Shots he's hit too thin but still pretty good, he's nicknamed "Olson twins," and shots he's hit fat but end up nice are "Candace Camerons" "Atta babe" he says the few times a round he strikes it clean or sinks a lengthy putt. He cheats too, Richie. He used to shoot in the low 80s (his claim)—now it takes him hundreds of strokes to shoot in the high 90s. He doesn't replace his divots or fix his ball marks either. Or throw beer cans or snack wrappers in the trash. (Richie constantly has a pack of Razzles, a gum-candy Ryan thought only kids had a taste for.) But he hates dishonesty in government, "those lefty loons who want us to pay for everyone's college" and "this disgusting shitheap of a city we live." Ryan will some days hear the same subjects all round long—the big joke that's wokeness and snowflakes and "female" swimmers with big ole dicks." His hate for Hilary Clinton is possibly his most impassioned subject. "One of my tenants burns down the apartment cooking up crack and I'm in jail because the fire extinguisher was expired, yet Hilary—that cunt can run for fuckin' president

after murdering four American heroes then deleting a few thousand emails to cover her dike ass.” Richie’s a slumlord with places in Kensington and Harrowgate and the darkest depths of North Philly.

“Hey,” Richie’s saying now as they drive towards their balls (Richie always does the driving, with his left leg dangling outside the cart), “I’ve got a one-bedroom over in Fox Chase”—Richie wears this inordinate smile, the beginnings of a laugh, something wonky in his eyes, that make it appear as if he’s suddenly felt a fuzzy on his tongue or a sneeze is coming on—“it’s unoccupied till January if you’re looking for a little love shack for this puppy of yours.” Richie pulls up to his ball, squints and stares at his GPS watch, as if it matters one bit how far he is from a green Jon Rohm couldn’t reach with a 48-inch driver, and a tee, and a downwind. The fuzzy-sneeze face hasn’t fully faded as he turns and looks at Ryan: “I’ll bring the key next week . . . if you can hold your load that long, lover boy.”

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He smells her before he sees her. At the water fountain, the one near her cube, he presses the push bar and reads *Helped eliminate waste from 69,420 disposable bottles*. Her scent, growing stronger, makes filling his thermos the greatest thing he’s done today. He turns and she’s closer than he thought she’d be, closer than people stand from one another. She sips from a purple Stanley tumbler; slow, calculated sips.

“Hey, handsome.” He nearly reciprocates a complement of the same sort—her tight yellow sweater, her makeup, there’s so many things he likes about the way she looks—but he remembers a sexual harassment video, from a training the company made them take, a series of horribly acted scenes that weren’t far off from an SNL sketch.

He settles on a joke—“Hey there, IT manager”—a flirt just the same.

That smile. Her voice—“You're so old, Ryan”—dots his arms with goosebumps. The way she says his name is somehow different—an intonation he's never before heard anyone use.

Rhiiiiine.

“Old I am. I still have an AOL account.”

“Bet you have a flip phone.”

“Na, razor slide phone.”

Taylor laughs—she does this thing where she protrudes her teeth and bulges her eyes and tilts her head; it's remarkable; the goosebumps spread to his stomach, his thighs—then, shifting her hips, nervous, he thinks, she asks if he'd be interested in going to McGillin's after work next Friday—“for Monique's retirement party.” Ryan can't place a Monique. He says he can't go but going is not the point in this, what brings him the greatest pleasure—the invitation is the pleasure, his knowing—her confirming—she does indeed want him. Ryan's beginning to think like a woman.

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Ryan's wife thinks their son's autistic. Ryan walks in from work to this. She wears her home uniform—her pajama pants, his T-shirt, the once-fun bun. She wears that face he dreads the most: the face before the crying comes. “—Look”—her phone screen is inches from his nose—“every symptom . . . Doesn't talk or answer to his name, doesn't dance . . . No-eye contact, the difficulty sleeping . . . the toe walking . . . the humming . . . the food aversions . . . How many little kids won't eat cake, Ry—or ice cream? What two-year-old loses his shit when you try to feed him ice cream?” Ryan sits beside her, in the corner of the couch, comforts her; of all the

countless times his wife has cried of late—after their baby died at twenty-three weeks; all throughout this last pregnancy and its numerous unpredictabilities; and now this—each instant he feels as though he has to, comfort her. He rubs her shoulders. He’s saying, “Babe, it’s too early to tell, he—” His wife cries with her eyes turned away from Ryan as if she’s doing something wrong, by crying; it reminds him of his mother, crying, Ryan’s father having left the house out a slammed door and little Ryan, seven-, eight-, nine-years-old, catching her down in the laundry room, crouched in the corner, and asking her why—why are you crying, Mommy?

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Every time Richie sees this certain beer-cart girl, he says “mamacita!” in his best perverted Latin accent. Richie’s love for females—of all ages and sizes and races—may surpass his love for God and for Country and his hate for Hilary. Richie has been dating a thirty-some who works at the strip club he goes down by the river. She’s been living with him, “till her divorce and custody shit is figured out.” Desiree—Dez—isn’t a stripper, “you don’t date those pigs,” Richie’s told Ryan, but a bartender; a brilliant girl. She’s developed an ap, Dez, “some newfangled-type shit,” Richie’s words, “for gettin’ people’s social medias scrubbed—so, ya know, employers can’t cancel them”; all Richie would be is her silent partner. Bad, bad luck she’s had, this kid—bad parents, bad boyfriends—this last loser especially. Richie calls the ex, Dez’s ex, the ole troglodyte or Diabetes Steve or Lester Diamond. Regardless of the nickname, Ryan always knows when Richie’s talking about Dez’s ex; Dez’s ex has become a big piece of Ryan’s life, has even slithered his way into Ryan’s dreams at night. Ryan at one time found the nicknames funny. Guido the Killer Pimp. K-Fed. Joey Buttafuoco . . . By laughing, though, Ryan has begun to believe he’s emboldened Richie, and what’s worse than an idiot with confidence? The

nicknames are getting less and less funny. Fredo Corleone. Jeff Gillooly. As if he's googling the biggest losers in popular culture before every round they play.

"I'm workin' on this volumptuous vixen right here," Richie is saying now as the young girl in the beer cart is heading up the path that leads to the green where Richie has just made his 8 (likely a 6 on the scorecard) and Ryan is still playing, lining up a five- or six-foot bogey and hoping Richie will shut the fuck up.

"*Volumptuous?*" Ryan says, making the mistake of acknowledging Richie's nonsense just before he's set to attempt his putt. Ryan wants to lower his head and putt the ball—he's trained himself to play just fine while Richie talks in his backswing—but he waits: the spectacle that's about to occur, that occurs every time the mamacita dares to drive past Richie, is too hard to look away from.

"I mean, she ain't skinny," Richie says, kind of shouts back at Ryan, over the rumbling of the beer cart motoring, bouncing closer. Then: "Hey, lover boy"—Richie has arrived at his golf bag—"got that apartment key for you, by the way. If you ain't gonna use it, then Rich Chi-Chi Rodriquez is gonna take his mamacita there." And here it comes. Richie pulls his driver from his bag, tosses off the Calloway head cover. With both hands, he hoists the club out in front of him, like he's fishing for the young girl, and waggles the club and thrusts his hips just as she passes by with a face full of terror. Still smiling, Ryan putts and comes up short. Richie, from his tippy toes: "Never up, never in, lover boy."

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“Good afternoon, this is Taylor from IT,” the familiar voice on his desk phone is saying. For a second—less than a second—Ryan actually thinks it’s IT calling, given he was once again sitting there in front of a computer screen with his hand in his face, cursing under his breath.

“How’d you know I needed help”—he is smiling now, as if *he* is the young girl in puppy love—“what, are you stalking me?”

“What if I was, what would you do about it?”

“I’d—I’d tell you to get down here and perform your wizardry.”

And then she’s there. The shampooed curls, the little tattoo behind her ear—*Tay Tay* between the two parts of a broken heart—and those eyes: tie-dyed blue eyes that constantly carry him away, take him back to a time when desires could be acted on. And of course, of course—that undeniable scent. She’s scrolling and clicking and squinting. Her thigh brushes into Ryan’s. He wonders where it comes from, her smell, if it’s rubbed all over her or sprayed in one specific region. The clock on his computer says 12:19 and all employees need to take their forty minutes for lunch between 11 and 1; Ryan hasn’t gone to lunch yet. But who cares—he’s lost his appetite; Taylor—*Tay Tay*—is his appetite now.

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Ryan’s become obsessed with googling. He tells his wife to *stop it!*, stop googling, and then he’s on the toilet or in the parking lot at the Wawa googling “signs of autism in toddlers.” He googles to fit his narrative, to give him answers he wants—“Are children with autistic traits sometimes not autistic?” “Do basic traits of developmental delays in toddlers sometimes mimic autistic qualities?” The internet can ruin or reward you, it’s all in *your* hands. Ryan can always find a website that lets him sleep at night.

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Richie likes, Ryan thinks, that they've only just met, likes that Ryan has no way of knowing if Richie could really have done all he says he used to do or does now or will soon be doing. Richie is a joke to most of the guys who bum around the course—since summer, they've been sending Richie texts from a number Richie doesn't know and pretending to be Luna the beer cart girl (mamacita). She finds him mucho sexy, they've told Richie, and likes the way his hips fly wildly when he swings that big, big shaft. She wants him—wants him very, very badly—*“but if the boss find out I involve with customer I am fire and deported—I am illegal. Shhhhh.”* Luna (the guys) has also told Richie, she would let him, one day, do very, very bad things to her . . . Till then, though, they shall only speak through text, *never* en persona. Until she finds another job, she wants Richie (*Big Dick* he's referred to in all these texts) to only say hola to her with a sign, a secreto gesture—to pull a big wood from his bag, to grab his longest, thickest shaft and pretend it's his massive el penis every time he sees her in her cart—it can be his little escondido hola to senorita . . . *“till invierno when you can use your mucho gigantesco wood on ALL of mamacita's holes.”*

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Taylor left her employee ID card on Ryan's desk; she needs this—everyone in the office does—to access the building. Big fat men dressed in pretend police outfits who've seen you every day for years will deny you entry to the place you work because a card with your picture isn't in your possession. Ryan holds her card, sniffs it. It's an excuse for her to see him again, he realizes.

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The developmental pediatrician won't make a diagnosis before the boy is three years old. Ryan's wife: "I can't wait a fucking year for this!" Their house seems colder than it used to. All Ryan wants to do is cozy up in bed and sleep hours and hours of dreamless sleep, but coming home—being home—is when his real job begins: the nightmare that is feeding and soothing and putting the boy to sleep; every time he looks at the boy, he's looking for (and seeing) symptoms of autism; his wife, he feels, has slipped into a depression worse than the one that followed their preterm loss. Ryan can't imagine putting up the Christmas decorations this year, or ever again. "Babe," he says, "he is *our* child—some bullshit label doesn't fucking matter—he's our boy and we want him exactly the way he came." This is nowhere close to how Ryan truly feels.

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After just seven holes today (darkness, snow flurries and freezing rain), Ryan and Richie headed to O'Houl's across Gilford Avenue. Richie has coaxed Ryan there and now they're finishing their second beers. They're both wearing thermals beneath their golf shirts. The twinkle lights behind the bar, the artificial tree beside the to-go fridge, the snowflakes, bigger, chunks now, out the bar's front window are worsening the butterflies that have been living in Ryan's gut since *autism* became the greatest evil he's ever known. Richie orders them another round then stares at the bartender's ass as she heads to get their drinks. Richie wants to "smash that pussy," he is telling Ryan, whispering louder than he thinks; he wants to pull those jeans down and clean her kitchen good. Ryan likes her too, but the way you like watching the nightly news or eating a bowl of fruit; Ryan feels sorry for the girl and tells Richie that she wears her pain all over her face—it's sad, Ryan says.

“She’s gonna be wearing my spooge all over her face if she doesn’t watch herself.”

Ryan had been considering letting Richie in on the trick that’s being played on him, telling him that *mamacita* is actually Billy and Fat Pat and Pickles and McClosky, but elects now to let it ride.

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Ryan decides to wait for Taylor. Going to her desk, searching for her might seem pathetic. And plus, having her card right there in his top desk drawer, awaiting her arrival—he’ll smell her before he sees her—makes the workday go faster, gives the day an anticipation, a purpose. By three, though, she hasn’t shown; he stops at her cubicle on the way to the train. Her cubemate is there. Taylor, though, is gone for the day.

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When his wife was pregnant this last time, she received weekly shots starting in the second trimester. Progesterone helped, the doctors believed, treat an incompetent cervix, which was, the doctors also believed, the reason for the preterm loss in her prior pregnancy. With Ryan by her side, nurses stabbed her with needles from sixteen to thirty-six weeks, and that’s what helped deliver the baby to term—“and that’s what gave him fucking autism!” she was telling Ryan now, screaming, crying. “And he’s not—no fucking way in hell is he getting any more shots. No! No! NO!! No fucking doctors. No one’s telling me what to do *any-fucking-more!* No one is stabbing my baby!” Ryan doesn’t respond—there is nothing left to say, given what has gone down these past few weeks—but a joke comes to mind. Jokes, endless, limitless jokes of all kinds have always been a great piece of their life together, what’s connected them going back to their days

of frat house couches and red Solo cups full of cheap brands of beer. So many jokes. Two decades worth. Adult jokes that brought out the kids in them. Jokes about his macho, far right—always right—father. Jokes about her control-freak, self-centered sister—*ME-gan*. Jokes they shared with no one. After her first loss—the chemical pregnancy they never really counted as a miscarriage—Ryan climbed in bed beside his crying wife and gave their lost embryo a name: Al. Big Al. Allie cat. She stared and narrowed her eyes: *Hunh?* “It’s the only chemical symbol that was an actual name—Aluminum—Al,” he’d said. She laughed so hard she farted. Right now he wants to make a joke, turn her tears to farts. *Babe*, he wants to say, *I don’t think another vaccination will make him “more autistic.”* He wonders lately when they’ll joke the way they used to. Will they ever?

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Richie sometimes sends Ryan texts. Each conversation—if that’s what you want to call it—starts the same way: “Yo Brah.” Richie’s subsequent texts cover everything from Hilary—her secret life as a lesbian, her being the mastermind behind Jeffrey Epstein’s murder—to their golf league, the standings, the guys he suspects “*ain’t countin’ ‘em all.*” Ryan’s phone will sometimes buzz and buzz and buzz as late as three or four a.m., on weeknights even, with memes or rants from whacko right-wing pundits, or screen shots, texts, where other golfers, too, complained of certain players having cheated. Tonight there’s no conspiracies or screen shots of evidence that follow “Yo Brah,” only a message: “*Here’s the address of the Fox Chase joint. 2214 Ridgeway. Apt C. Gotta wiggle the key a little . . . and keep that window cracked—just painted.*”

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On the train home, he texts around for Taylor's number. An email, he feared, she wouldn't read in time, and her Facebook (which Ryan is most certainly familiar with) is a picture of a cute teenage girl with braces, Taylor at sixteen or seventeen, so he's assumed she hasn't used the account in years. By the time he's through the center city tunnels and onto the open-air tracks near the Spring Garden stop, he has gotten her number. He edits the text over and over, takes another two stops to finally send, "*Hi Taylor, this is Ryan from work. I got your number from Debbie Coyne. You left your ID on my desk. I have it. Let me know if you want me to get it to you.*" He saves her in his contacts as the name he calls her in his mind, the name he's tempted to say when he senses her flirting, then quickly thinks of Matt Lauer . . . or Charlie Rose . . . or James Franco and he stops himself. He'll delete it later, but just once he wants to see "Tay Tay" flash on his screen.

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The moment, a few minutes, each night after he rocks the boy to sleep and before he places him in the crib: Ryan has the time to think about his life, about the things that have happened and the things that almost happened but didn't. There's a white-noise machine that helps to drown out sounds and a battery-operated bear that rotates and illuminates the dark room with stars. He'll touch the boy, smell his skin, he'll pray that the boy doesn't have what they fear, though Ryan knows already it's true: he's the father of an autistic son. He cries some nights, Ryan. Tonight he doesn't, cry; he caresses the sleeping boy's cheek and he thinks of Taylor DeCristofaro. Earlier, just as he was leaving the train, walking across the station parking lot towards his car, the reply from Tay Tay came: OMG she was sooo thankful. She'd thought it was lost, had already emailed HR, but knew they wouldn't get back to her by tomorrow morning when she'd have no way of

getting into the building. “*You are my hero 🥰*,” she wrote. Another text came: Could he meet her before work tomorrow? She always has coffee and a bagel at Kesmit’s by the park. Ever been? “*Soooo yum.*” She wants to buy him breakfast. “*Ryan! Thank you! Thank you! Thank youuuuuuu!!!!*”♥♥ He’s rereading these texts right now. He’s hearing her say his name. *Rhiiiiine*. He can almost smell her through the phone. The boy is long asleep, but Ryan keeps rocking and rocking. Ryan likes to picture the places he’s going before he goes. He sees the scenes—a mishmash of imagination and past experience. There’s a little diner down the block from Ryan’s house he and his wife would sometimes go when they were “enjoying each other,” his wife’s words for the extended honeymoon phase, their mid-thirties, when they hadn’t caved and started having babies and, as his wife put it, “hating each other like every other couple we know.” It’s where they went, too, to escape their brains, after the preterm loss, those dark, cold months before they were allowed to start trying again and Ryan, as a courtesy to his wife, would give up drinking again. She was waiting there, his wife, one weekday afternoon amidst this winter of pain and uncertainty, waiting in their favorite booth by the window facing the traffic on Ferndale Avenue when Ryan came right from the train and through the door that dinged when it opened—she wore sweats and a hoodie and a wool hat; she was still on sick leave from her job with the school district (the greatest country in the world didn’t believe in any sort of paid time off for mothers of dead babies.) Sitting there with the late afternoon sun illuminating her face, sitting there sipping orange juice, without the added champagne, she smiled in a way he hadn’t seen in months and told him she was pregnant. Happy wasn’t a way he’d describe how he felt right then—no, the news of a baby did not make him happy; losing the last one was still far too fresh. Visions, though, a pang of a beautiful future, did hit him some seconds after his mimosa—his last dance with booze for some time—was beginning to hit him. He saw a son, like the last one

who arrived too early and left far too soon, he saw a son and the little league field and a boy who resembled a young Ryan rounding the bases and heading for the plate, Ryan picking up his boy and carrying him off the field as the teammates and fans cheered on. He could hear the boy's voice, hear the boy calling him Daddy, asking to go for ice cream as they were leaving the park. Throughout Ryan's entire life, the reality, the real scenes of his life, never resembled the ones he'd concocted beforehand; this one, though—little league and “Daddy” and ice cream—how couldn't it all come true?

He carries his son now, *this* boy here, this tiny stranger Ryan could never have envisioned and does not feel belongs to him or his wife in any way. He carries him to the crib and gently lays him on his back. He uses the glow of his phone to make sure the boy is covered up properly, that the boy's favorite fishy is right securely beside him. He stares, at his son's peaceful face, wondering what's behind those closed eyes, inside that brain that came from him and his wife. Ryan's phone is vibrating. Ryan's eyes go from his boy to his text—“*Yo Brah.*”