

Years ago, I remember watching you come home for the first time. Rain crept from somber and heavy clouds that wet, fateful morning. I was outside, sitting on my tiny balcony, huddled under the warmth of the blanket your grandmother gave me when I ran away. I lit my last cigarette to accompany another sip of coffee when I saw your mother and father park their car in the lot.

I recognized the terrible bumper stickers that your mother loved to plaster all across her car. Your father schlepped your booster seat from the back seat of the sedan and began to lead your mother. I watched your tiny fist reach past the cloth covering you, as if you were reaching to the heavens for your first touch of the outside world. Your tiny, clenched fist suddenly opened and your stretched hand began to flail about.

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Their walk up the path was sweet and lackadaisical, your mother rested her head on his shoulder as they moved in fluid motion. The light of morning had not yet reached our tiny complex, but I could see joy across her face, lit by each lamp they passed.

I took another sip and turned the page of my newspaper to the Finance section and began to plot the day's trading, no intern made headway without staying well-read. I could hear your grandfather's words of elderly wisdom ring true through the patter of rain that day, "The separation is in the preparation, young man!"

It was a bit old, but it was warm, and all I had to give. I took my last sip of coffee and got ready for the day. I put away the little bit of me that I could in a box, to share the warmth your grandmother once shared with me. I rushed to put it together and left it at your door, from me to you, always to hold you while you slept. I thought about the tiny box as I ran to catch my train, it was the last thought of mine you would get.

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Years ago, I remember hearing your tiny, unmistakable shrill from the dining room table as I poured myself the leftover scotch the boss deigned worthy enough to leave after the big win. The scream pierced my ears like glass shattering directly in front of me. An uneasy feeling crept down my throat into my stomach, were you okay? Your sobs pulled at my heart and made my stomach beat like a drum. My feet dragged me outside to the balcony where I saw you grasping the grass and sobbing over your skinned knee.

The velvet sun seemed to shine solely on you, lighting up those familiar sparkling, auburn eyes. My heart raced and chapped lips began to part in order to call out to you before I noticed your mother

sitting against the tree, arms wide open awaiting your company. You slowly began to notice her presence, those kind eyes, the same as I did; suddenly the fear washed from your face like smudges from a mirror. Your shoulders slumped down and you threw your arms right around her, all was right, or at least it was better. She caressed your flowing locks, your hair looked so different from the first morning I became aware that you more than a passing thought. I turned to go back inside, wiping the moisture from my eyes when I saw your mother's gaze hovering over me. It was there I noticed you both sat on my blanket.

It reminded me of the night you came to be, after your mother's solemn eyes locked onto me. She had thought that I had dreams to stay, but things always change in the light of day and so a secret our time together remained, that is until you came.

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Years ago, I remember watching the cardboard boxes stack outside your apartment across the courtyard. A cacophony of voices, laughter, and music flowed from the open doors and windows, it was then I saw you helping outside in your own little way; supervising, so it seemed. I leaned over the banister to get a better look at you had and just how big you'd grown. Sun-kissed locks of hair danced in the breeze, tumbling around and making up dance moves in an oversized sweater with hearts and rainbows on the California sun. As you twirled and played I felt a strange pull to sit by your side, to see the world through your eyes, and to feel what it was like to walk around with so much love in your heart; when I so intimately knew the loneliness from which you came.

I saw no fear in your eyes, no questions of where the future would take you, only sweet satisfaction in the summer sun. You plopped down on my grandmother's blanket, exhausted. I watched your father step out from the apartment and your eyes connected with his, satisfaction turned to joy as you ran to his arm. Even with his stubby arms and tiny build, he effortlessly lifted you and suddenly; your smile came to life. He put you on his back and walked back inside. The music died down and howling laughter erupted, you were gone. I went back in and sat down to finish orientation paperwork, the thought of looking for a place in Midtown would have to wait.

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Years ago, I remember. I remember sitting up all night, drinking until my eyes grew heavy and smoking cigarettes until they burnt my fingertips. Burning memories we never made because I didn't have the courage to try and fail.