

I sit down with my mother. My smile is shaky as I tell her about my day.

“I think I did okay on my History test,” I say. “Oh, and Olivia wore her new pair of false eyelashes, the ones I told you about. She was batting them around so much that a teacher stopped and asked if she had something caught in her eyes.” I laugh at the memory, and the sound is shaky too. “Olivia wasn’t super happy about that.”

There’s the slightest movement, but it’s not on Mom’s face. Her face never changes. But under the skin of Mom’s stomach...I don’t want to look but I can’t help it, because there my mother’s skin is moving.

Because the baby is moving. I close my eyes.

When I open them, Mom's stomach is stretched out and still.

"Emma, are you ready to go?" Dan says as he comes into the room, and I look up at him and nod.

"Did you two have a nice chat?" he says, bending over to kiss Mom.

I stare at him.

He must feel it because he straightens up, clearing his throat, and pats Mom's stomach. "Look how big he's getting. Lisa, he's growing so much."

Mom doesn't say anything, not even to that. She can't.

She's dead. Machines are keeping her alive. They breathe for her. They feed her. They regulate her whole body.

My mother is dead, but Dan is keeping her alive because of the baby.

Dan and I don't talk on the ride home. As soon as I'm inside the house I head straight up to my room, and I lock the door.

I never used to have a lock, but then, I used to have Mom. I used to think that Dan cared about what I thought. What I wanted. What Mom would have wanted. This way, all the talks he used to try to have, right after Mom first died, can't happen. Or at least, he can talk, but I don't have to see him and can put on music or headphones or even fingers in my ears to shut him out. Just like he shut me out.

I don't have one of those wussy little turn-and-click locks. I have an actual lock, a bar with a padlock that I snap shut.

Closing out the world.

I put it in myself the day Dan told me what he was going to do to Mom. I walked out of the hospital, went to the hardware

store and came home and put in the lock. My mother taught me how to do that. She believed women should know how to fix things. I'd seen her fix a broken toilet and watched her change the element in our hot water heater. She installed new locks on our doors when I was seven, after Olivia's family got robbed.

I go over to my window and open it. On the roof, Olivia grins at me through her blond hair and then comes over and pushes herself inside.

"How did you know I was out there?"

"I saw your hair when we came in. Also, your car down the road. Thanks for not parking...here."

"It makes things easier," she says. "And clearly, I need a wig. Oooh, I could get a bunch. Red hair, blue hair—"

"That wouldn't stand out at all."

She sticks her tongue out at me. "I'd get other ones too. Brown hair, black hair. I could be a spy, don't you think?"

"Spies have to use computers, Olivia."

"No, they don't. They go on missions. They have tech people do the computer stuff for them."

"Someone's been watching *Covert Ops*."

"Like you don't watch it too. You know you love it. You and your mom both think Sebastian is..." She trails off.

"Sebastian is cute," I say, and try not to think about how Mom and I used to watch the show together. "But he's also fictional, plus even spies on TV have to use earpieces and stuff—would you be willing to do that?"

"For Sebastian I would," she says, grinning, and then flops on my bed. "But I really wish I could be an old-fashioned spy. Like

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back when they had to write coded messages in in- visible ink
and speak a dozen languages.”

“That sounds more like you,” I say, and sit down next to her.
“I—I saw the baby move today.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“Emma,” she says, squeezing my hand, “why do you even go to the hospital?”

“Because I can see her. Because I want at least one person to be there for Mom and not for the baby.”

“Dan—”

“Dan wants the baby. You know it, I know it. If Mom was alive...”
I stare at my dresser, at the photo of Mom and me. It was taken in Vermont when we went skiing. Mom is smiling and has one arm around me, holding me tight. It was the last vacation we took together, just her and me. She was thirty-five. I was ten.

She met Dan two weeks after we got back from Vermont. I was nice to him when I met him because he actually asked where I wanted to go to dinner when Mom suggested the three of us go out. I thought he was kind.

I also thought he loved Mom.

“Hey,” Olivia says, and I look at her.

“She’d love you for being there,” she says. “She does love you for being there. I know it.”

I hug her, and Olivia hugs me back.

Dan knocks on my door. “Emma, you want some pizza? I made triple cheese.”

Of course he did. Dan doesn’t order food. He makes it. “The perfect man,” Mom used to say. “He can cook, he makes the bed

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and he remembers to put the toilet seat down.” Then she’d laugh and kiss him.

She loved him so much.

“I’m not hungry,” I say.

“I’ll leave it by the door,” he says with a sigh. “Olivia, do you want me to leave you a slice too?”

Olivia looks at me. I shrug.

“Okay,” Olivia says, and Dan says, “Thanks for coming today, Emma.” Like he does every day. Like I’m doing it for him. Like I’m somehow in this with him.

I unbolt the door after five minutes. When I first started locking myself in, Dan would hang around and try to talk to me when I came out. I used to like how hard he tried, but I sure don’t now. Not after what he’s done to Mom. Now I wait until I’m sure he’s gone.

Olivia eats most of the pizza and then says she has to get home to make sure her parents eat.

“Wish me luck,” she says. “Prying their handheld what- evers away from them for longer than thirty seconds makes them both go into withdrawal. See you tomorrow?”

“Yeah. You don’t have to go out on the roof to leave, you know.”

“I know,” she says. “But if I use the front door or try to go out any other way, I’ll see Dan. And I know he’ll ask me about you. He did the last time I left that way. I think he— well, I think he’s worried about you, you know?”

“Why? Because my mother is dead and he’s kept her body alive so he can try to save his precious son? Because I have to see her lying there—” I break off and open the window for

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Olivia.

Olivia hugs me again and then leaves. After she does, I

close my window and get into bed. It's early, but I don't care. In bed, I can look at my ceiling. It's yellow and the color is swirled around so there are a million patterns and shapes to get lost in. Mom painted it last year even though the doctor didn't want her "exerting" herself because she'd just had a blood clot taken out of her leg.

"Think about this instead of that boy," she'd said when I came in and lay down on the bed to look at it.

"I can't," I'd said. "Anthony broke my heart."

"I know," she'd said, lying down next to me. "But one day he won't matter."

"He said I was lovely." I'd looked up at the ceiling.

"They all say something like that," she'd told me. "Trust the one who takes his time saying it."

"Dan said he was falling in love with you on your second date."

"Dan's different," she'd said. "He's older, for one thing. And so am I. It's...you won't believe me, but one day Anthony will just be a memory and it won't hurt when you see him at all, I promise."

She was right. I wish I'd told her that. I could have. Anthony was nothing to me ages before she died.

I wish I could tell Mom something, anything, and have her really hear it.

"I miss you," I whisper, and listen to Dan moving around downstairs. If I close my eyes, I can pretend I hear Mom, that this is just another night.

That she's still here.

Dan drives me to school in the morning. He has done this since he and Mom got married, and I used to like it although I did start to ride with Olivia when she got her license.

That stopped when Mom died. I wanted Dan to remember I was around. I wanted him to remember Mom.

Like, Mom worried about my grades. Not that they weren't good enough, but that I was working too hard. Dan told her that in order to grow up I had to be allowed to make my own choices.

Oh yes, Dan and his choices.

We drive to school in silence. At seventeen, I'm old enough to get my license, but the waiting list to get into any of the driver's ed classes within half an hour of the house stretches

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out for months. I'd planned to put my name on a list last year but never got around to it.

Last year, before everything happened, Dan promised that over the summer he'd teach me how to drive and then I could just go get my license.

I don't want him teaching me to drive now. What if something happens? What if I get hurt? If my body stops working, my brain stops functioning? Would he have machines keep me alive in case his son might one day need something? A lung, a kidney, bone marrow?

But I do ride in the car with him to school. I do it because it means he will have to pick me up afterward. That he will have to see me, that he will take me to see Mom. He works at home, so he can do that.

Or at least, he used to work at home. I don't know if he still does, or if all the database consulting he did stopped when Mom did. Lately, he hasn't mentioned any two-hour phone calls to talk someone through using a new feature he's built.

But then, I haven't asked. I don't want to talk to him.

He was going to stay home with the baby, and Mom was going to go back to work. That was their plan. She was an assistant manager at BT&T bank. They sent flowers when she died. They didn't send anything for the baby. Maybe they didn't know what to do about it, but maybe they heard about what Dan's doing and think he's keeping a dead woman alive so he can get what he wants.

If they do, I love them for that. I mean, I know it's a baby and

it's partly Mom, but I wish Dan had just once thought about what Mom would have wanted. It was so easy for him

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Elizabeth
Scott

to choose to keep her here, dead, and it's so hard for me to think about, much less see.

"I got a call from your AP History teacher about how you're doing in class. Maybe we should talk about it," Dan says as we stop, one car in the many that are waiting to snake into the high school. Mostly freshman and sophomores get out here. Juniors get rides with their friends who have licenses or, better yet, get their own and a car to go with it.

I could get a ride with Olivia, but I don't.

"See you later," I tell Dan and get out of the car. I won't talk to him about school just like I won't ride to school with Olivia anymore. If I did, then Dan would get to feel like things are normal and they're not. They are so not. Not while Mom is still...

The tears hit me hard, hot pressure behind my eyes, in my throat, in my chest. It's hard to breathe, to see, to think.

I look down at the ground and walk, blinking hard once they've started to spill down my face.

I cry without making a sound now. I have cried soundlessly, wordlessly, since I stood with Dan at the hospital and heard, "I'm sorry, but..."

Dan cried openmouthed then, sobbing, yelling his grief for everyone to see. I tried to hug him. I felt for him because I thought he loved her, because we were in the same place, because she was gone and he felt the gaping hole that had been born too, a Mom-shaped space in the universe.

He didn't hug me back. He didn't even seem to see me.
And then the doctor told him about the baby.
"Hey," Olivia says, and I know it's her because I would

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know her voice anywhere. We've been friends since first grade, and we've been through period trauma, boy crap, bad hair, her parents and their ways. And now Dan and his baby.

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