

FROM A DIFFERENT TRIBE

One of the old women severed the umbilical cord and passed the tiny body, slippery and warm, up into Leona's arms. It felt unnatural to hold the baby; the infant seemed too small somehow, almost weightless. Leona rolled carefully onto her side and settled the baby next to her. The brand-new hands splayed and stretched blindly in the dim air. Dust motes floated in the crack of light coming through the one palm-sized window cut from the mud walls. Leona watched as the dust swirled. She wished she had a bigger window. She craved light and air. For the first time in the almost twelve months she'd been in Kenya, she yearned for things she'd left home in America. She wanted clean lines and shiny surfaces, nurses in sensible shoes and the comfort of hospital machinery whirring and clicking and dripping around her. For a minute, she even wanted her mother.

The small body wiggled beside her and a sound came out—staccato like the bleating of a newborn goat. It was a tenuous sound, hesitant, an experiment with an uncertain outcome. The tiny lips pursed in anticipation of what only Leona could give. It was a girl, Leona saw. She squeezed her eyes against

the coming tears and tried to roll over onto her stomach. She wanted to bury her face in darkness. She was so tired. She felt a sob in her throat and then a sound filled the dark room. It was her scream, she understood, although she couldn't feel her mouth opening or the reverberation of air. She only heard the sound of keening fill the space around her head and saw Simi and the Maasai attendants jerk their faces up and look at her, then glance at one another, concerned. Simi reached across the baby's back to take Leona's hand, but Leona shook her friend off and brought her hands to her face. She tried to press them over her mouth tightly enough to stop the sound. Her insides were glass, shattering in the shell of her skin. This baby was born of loneliness—the desperate kind that arises in people who live among foreigners; who don't share language or gestures.

Leona arrived at the manyatta in a little, dented Renault 4 she purchased, with cash, from a departing French expatriate who she'd met her first night in Nairobi. She drove the distance between Nairobi and Loita hesitantly. It was her first time in Africa and the small car didn't feel like it would offer protection from lions or elephants or any other wild game that might lurk in the yellow savannah grassland she drove through. The drive terrified her so much that she promised herself to stay in the manyatta and only use the car for emergencies. But after a few weeks the dry dust made Leona's skin itch, and the nearest water source, a little tributary of the Mara River, was low and thick, too muddy to bathe in. Leona didn't miss much from home, but she did miss the feeling of a shower, the water soaking her hair and skin. She couldn't stand the way her skin felt, the way her body stank. She wanted a hot shower. She wanted to immerse herself in soap and water, to scrub her hair and fingernails and wash the spaces between her toes. Her yearning to be clean was visceral.

So, only six weeks after her arrival, she packed an overnight

bag and drove to Narok to spend the night at the Chabani Guest House. The hotel was small and cheap, mostly used by safari guides and the occasional shoestring tourist or traveling Peace Corps volunteer. But it was clean, and with electricity, running water and a real, if old, mattress, it felt luxurious to Leona. The sky outside was darkening and cool when she arrived. The purple dusks in Kenya were short; night came quickly. Leona turned on all the lights in her room, and laughed at how easily they flicked into brightness. The manyatta had no electricity. After she scrubbed the dirt from her skin and scalp and stood under the warm, rusty water until it ran cold, she dressed in clean clothes, the one set she hadn't worn yet, saved in the bottom of her suitcase. Until now, she'd only smelled it occasionally. The scent of the American detergent lingered in the fibers and reminded her of home.

She felt new and lighter somehow, cracked free of her dusty shroud. With the smell of floral shampoo still lingering in her hair, Leona went down to the hotel's café to order a drink.

The bar was wooden-walled and dark. The only light came from a string of colored Christmas tree bulbs—the big ones people back home wrapped around outside tree branches—and a disco ball revolving slowly above a central space where people could dance. There were no dancers that night. Maybe it was still too early.

Leona chose the bar stool farthest away from the only other customers, a white couple, both about her age, maybe a little older. Leona didn't like small talk so she avoided making eye contact with the two. But she hadn't seen other white people for weeks, and she found herself unable to keep from glancing up at them. The two were clean; both neatly dressed, which made Leona think they might be tourists. But the woman turned slightly, and Leona recognized the logo of a well-known anti-poaching foundation on the front of her T-shirt. The woman was pretty. Petite and blonde with a sunburned spot on her nose

and rosy pink cheeks, she watched the man intently as he spoke, his body movements fluid as he gestured with his arms, acting out the story he was telling her. The man was attractive, square shouldered and blond with large, tan hands. Leona forced herself to look away and focused her concentration on gathering the right collection of Swahili words to order a beer. She felt the sudden lightness of joy when the barkeep slid a sweating, brown Tusker bottle her way. She didn't bother asking for a glass.

The beer—after so long without alcohol—made her feel luminous and unencumbered. The couple laughed loudly and Leona glanced at them again. The blonde woman was standing, holding out a bill, which the man waved away. He turned to the barkeep and said something in rapid-fire Swahili. Then he turned back to the woman and laughed again. Leona heard him say, “Now you'll have to meet me again, next one's on you.”

Leona watched him watch the woman walking out of the bar. She wondered if anyone had ever watched her with that intensity.

Halfway through her second beer, she found she didn't mind when the blond man slid his stool closer to hers and offered to buy her another drink. As they talked, the ease of English after the weeks and weeks of only rudimentary Maa made Leona giddy. Normally a reserved, quiet person, she felt almost drunk with the millions of words she could so easily pluck from her head and toss out, like confetti.

“You're a flirt,” she said. “Your girlfriend barely left.”

“I am a flirt.” He nodded, smiling. “But you're wrong. She's not my girlfriend. I met her here tonight. Interesting girl, though. Working on antipoaching—elephant protection.”

They purposely avoided names. It didn't come up at first, names hadn't mattered, and anyway Leona, after weeks of being a curiosity among the Maasai, wanted the anonymity. As an anthropologist, she constantly had to study, observe and ask questions. Now, with this man, she wanted to suspend words and

curiosity and talk. Later, alcohol erased the curiosity of names, and the next morning, slow and headachy, Leona felt exposed. She wasn't new to sex, she'd had a couple of boyfriends during her college and grad school years, but they drifted into, and then out of, her life like ghosts. She'd never, though, slept with someone she'd just met, and under the weight of her headache and nausea, she was ashamed of what she'd done. She wanted to disappear. Sex was a fraught thing. Hard for her to indulge in, an unsettling mix of pleasure and fear.

The man was breathing evenly and heavily next to her, and she had to very carefully slide from under his arm and out of bed. She found her clothes and dressed quickly. But the door creaked when she opened it, and she heard his voice, sleepy and rough. "Going to leave without a goodbye?"

"I have to go back," she whispered.

"You mean you have to come back to bed," he said, patting the empty mattress beside him.

Leona turned back to the door and grasped the handle again, pulling it open. When it clicked shut behind her, she raced down the hall to her own room and tossed her shampoo, razor and yesterday's clothes in her bag. She'd planned to stay in Narok for the day. She wanted to have the hotel do her laundry, and indulge in a big breakfast with coffee. But now she changed her mind. She was embarrassed. She hated feeling out of control, and she was ashamed of herself for letting it happen. She lived by the mantra that it was best to be alone—less difficult, less complicated. She didn't want to see the man again, or look him in his eyes. She thought she'd see her own shame there, reflected back at her.

Outside the hotel, the morning street was almost empty, but already the air smelled like wood smoke, frying dough and rotting produce. She opened the trunk of her car and tossed her bag in.

"Is it me, or are you running out on your hotel bill?" a voice

called, and when Leona turned, he was there. He was dressed and his feet were shoved into unlaced boots. “I have to go up to Solai today. Can’t put it off. But I’ll come to the manyatta as soon as I’m done there. I’ll find you.”

Leona felt the bubbling up of terror deep inside her. It was always this way. Even in college, and graduate school, it wasn’t the sex that made her most frightened, but the aftermath. The first time she’d seen a therapist, it only took thirty minutes of talking through her background before the therapist said, “It sounds like you’re not sexually frigid, but emotionally cut off.” She’d never gone back for another appointment.

“No,” she said, “don’t bother with that.” She inhaled consciously. The panic made her breathing shallow, the imaginary walls that closed in around her made her lungs tense and ineffective. The man was standing close, looking down at her. His eyes were calm, and his face open. She could smell him—warm skin and sleepy breath.

“No, I want to,” he said. “I had fun with you last night. No reason we can’t see one another again, is there?”

There was always this dread when a man wanted to get to know her. She wasn’t normal in this way. Other women her age wanted boyfriends, wanted to marry. The idea set off an alarm in Leona’s mind. It always had. She could share physical intimacy, but the notion of allowing herself to want anything else, to be vulnerable in any other way, tore her in two—yearning and revulsion. She wanted to be normal and allow someone to love her, and to return love, but the fear was always too great, and it always won.

She couldn’t look at the man’s face when she answered. Instead, she glanced sideways, pretending to watch a mangy dog rolling in the dust. “I’m not interested in a relationship,” she said. It was her typical line, worn thin from use. She wondered if it sounded as implausible to him as it did to her.

“Who said anything about a relationship?” the man asked.

His lips turning up into a grin that made Leona's pulse quicken. "I'm just talking about seeing you again. Maybe reprising our night." He raised his eyebrows suggestively. He was flirting. Leona felt that hollow ache she always felt at moments like this; the ache of wanting something she was far too terrified to actually reach for.

"I have a boyfriend." That always worked. Even so, Leona didn't wait to see if his face changed, or if his voice hardened into understanding.

She turned, climbed into her car and slammed the door shut. She might have heard him calling, but she couldn't be sure. She sped off as fast as she could toward the manyatta. She didn't look back. She didn't glance into the rearview and see him standing next to his truck watching her leave. She didn't want to think about how she'd feel if he never really came looking for her.

Now, with the baby beside her in her little mud-walled hut, she had no desire to speak. She wept with fatigue and terror as the dark women hunkered at her side, murmuring and running their rough fingers along her arms and across the new baby's head.

"You must let her nurse," the Maasai midwife said. She reached over and pulled Leona's T-shirt up, freed her aching breast and clasped it firmly, rubbing the nipple on the baby's new mouth.

"Now it's empty, but the baby will bring the milk."

Leona wanted to cringe at the unfamiliar fingers on her breast and at the mewling little thing next to her. The baby was blindly flailing, her mouth open hopefully, trying to burrow into Leona's flesh like a chigger. Leona closed her eyes. She only wanted to sleep. The midwife grasped Leona's breast again, flattened it in her hand and inserted it firmly into the baby's mouth. Leona felt a strange sensation and opened her eyes. The baby was connected to her and its desperate little mouth was

pulling on Leona's flesh. A shudder of alarm rippled through her and she bit her lip against the scream she could feel rising in her mouth again. She couldn't be a mother.

At first when Leona noticed her missing period, she was relieved. The task of finding enough privacy and water to wash herself—let alone driving all the way to Narok to buy supplies—was something she dreaded. When the bleeding didn't appear, as it should have, Leona was happy. It was all the changes in diet and the syncing with the other women, she assumed. But then it didn't come again, and again.

When it dawned on her that she was pregnant, it was like she'd been diagnosed with a fatal disease. Her thoughts obsessively circled back to it, again and again. She couldn't concentrate on work and she couldn't sleep. Every time she closed her eyes, the tide of dread and distress washed through her. She spent hours flipping through the medical manual she'd brought with her in a desperate search for a remedy. The book offered no way to flush this thing out of her.

By the time she sought out the *laiboni*, the witch doctor and spiritual leader of the community, she hadn't slept for nearly a week. The *laiboni* was a wizened elder who sucked his few remaining teeth when he saw Leona and never seemed to understand her halting Maa. As the village doctor, he had a special role here and knowledge of traditional medicines Leona was dying to include in her work. But he was a stubborn interviewee, and Leona suspected he was wary of her presence in the village. She'd been delicately trying to gain his trust, not asking too much of him yet, instead hoping that the other villagers would assure him of her intentions. Being too direct with the old man might cement his unfavorable opinion. But now Leona was desperate.

"*Sopa*," she greeted him, ducking her head as a gesture of respect. He was sitting alone under an acacia tree just outside the village enclosure. He lethargically waved a bead-handled

cow tail in front of his face to keep the flies from setting into his eyes. He murmured his own greeting back but said nothing else. Leona lowered herself to the ground in front of him and crossed her legs. She batted a few lazy flies away and tried to decide what to say. Her phrase book lay in her lap, and she flipped through it. Where were the words she needed?

“Hello, my friend.” A voice above Leona pulled her from the book. Simi stood above her, smiling. Simi was the third and youngest wife of the secular village leader’s son. She had been educated in the local school up to sixth grade, and was the only woman in the village who spoke English. Simi wasn’t absolutely fluent, but had enough for most basic conversations and, more important, had the curiosity and dedication to interpret Leona’s explanations and hand gestures. Simi had a sense of the things Leona needed to learn to live in the manyatta, and was never shy about teaching them. She’d been the one, early in Leona’s stay here, to grasp Leona’s hand and guide her outside the village to the shallow riverbed, dry now, and indicate that Leona should come to this spot when she needed to relieve herself. Simi helped Leona buy the few kitchen items she needed—the large pot, or *suferia*, for boiling water, the frying pan, the tins of sugar and tea—and taught Leona how to keep the embers in her fire pit alive all day. She was the one who Leona talked to like a friend. But Leona couldn’t bear to be honest now. Not about this. Especially not about this.

“*Sopa, Simi,*” Leona said. She used the Maa word for hello, even though Simi preferred speaking English whenever possible. “I am researching the doctor’s work today. Can you help translate?”

Simi hunkered and spoke quickly to the old man. He nodded and waved his cow tail faster.

“What do you want to know?”

Simi relayed Leona’s question without a blink. Leona was sur-

prised. Maasai looked askance at premarital sex, and Leona knew her situation might cost her the relationships she'd built here.

"It's for my book," she assured Simi. And then she asked her to translate the detailed questions she had about the plant, where it was found and how much was used. Was it ingested or topical?

Later, when the old man stood up and shuffled home for tea, Simi turned to look at Leona. Leona tried to tell if Simi's eyes held anger or sadness and, if so, for whom?

"You should have asked only me. I could tell you this information. Now it is possible that the others in the village will discover your secret."

"Simi, it's not for me," Leona whispered, suddenly on the verge of exhausted tears. "It's for the book."

But Simi's face was serious now, and she leaned close to Leona's ear and whispered, "You have a baby...inside?"

Leona started as if her friend had slapped her. She looked down at Simi's slim fingers resting on her arm. She glanced up at Simi's face and then away again. What should she say? Knowing that Simi might disapprove or, worse, that she'd be reminded of her own pain made Leona frantic with embarrassment and anxiety.

"The man," Simi whispered, her eyes serious and steady, "did he force you?"

Leona couldn't stop the tears. Her eyes filled up and she used the heels of both hands to press into her eyes. "I'm sorry, Simi, I'm so sorry."

Leona considered two things: it was not acceptable for unmarried women to have children out of wedlock and, because of that taboo, her status as a foreigner would be the only thing to prevent the community from banishing her. She thought of the precarious position Simi herself was in—married for three years with no children of her own. Would Simi's desperation and the irony of the situation make her angry? That was a risk. Leona's work here was going well, and she couldn't bear the

idea of leaving. She couldn't bring herself to claim rape, but she could lie.

"My husband," she said. It was not unusual for Maasai spouses to live apart.

"You never told me you had a husband," Simi stated. Her voice was quiet, but Leona felt it like a warm current deep below cool water. Simi knew she wasn't married. Simi knew this baby belonged to nobody, but she wouldn't betray Leona's secret.

"Your husband, he must be a strong man." Simi smiled a small, sad smile. "He is living so far away in America, and still he can give you a baby!"

"Simi, I can't have a baby." Leona searched for a reason that Simi would understand, a lie to cover a truth that Simi would never really be able to understand. "My body is broken. It's dangerous for me to deliver a child." This was a reason a Maasai woman would see as reasonable. Not the other, not the choice Leona made to sleep with a stranger.

Later, after the village was quiet and dark and most families had settled around their fires in their little huts, Simi slipped through Leona's door. She held a blue plastic bag filled with leaves.

"I found this for you near the river. Put some inside where the baby is." And then she slipped outside again.

The leaves were rough and uncomfortable, and Leona worried they would somehow make her sick, poison her for her stupidity. But she slipped a few inside herself several times a day and waited for the relief of blood. It never came. Instead, her breasts began to hurt, she found herself thirsty and her jeans grew tighter and tighter. It was too late.

Leona considered driving to Nairobi to check herself into the hospital for the birth, but it was easier for her to force forgetfulness, and eventually she lost track of the days. There was work to do here. It had been a dry year and the year before had been dry, too. The Maasai in Loita were worried; cattle

and goats had begun to get thin. Some of the baby goats had already died, their mothers too emaciated to produce enough milk. Years ago, the Maasai were free to go wherever the good grazing land was. In times of drought, they moved their herds a hundred and seventy miles to Nyeri, in the central highlands, where grass stayed greener and rains were more common. Under British rule, though, the government limited their movements and, with British settlers setting up their own farms, Maasai land was reduced further. The final nail in the coffin of the traditional Maasai way of life was the wildlife preserves. In the 1970s, citing the need for land and wildlife conservation, great swathes of Maasai land were designated as game parks. Grazing was prohibited.

Leona's work was centered on discovering and mitigating the effects of the government-imposed strictures on the traditionally nomadic Maasai people in Western Kenya. She had the idea that if she could prove that the Maasai culture was changing, and that those changes would negatively impact Kenya in general, it would add fuel to the argument that the government should allow the Maasai more movement, more chances to keep herds healthy and more chances to survive. Her study was vital, life and death, and Leona took it that way—without the option of other grazing land, this culture could disappear as fast and as easily as the rivers and streams were drying.

She had no idea how pregnant she actually was. Thinking about how much time had passed made her panic, so she forced herself not to think about it, let alone plan for it. She hadn't seen a doctor; she hadn't had checkups. She spent the months trying to ignore her growing belly and forcing all thoughts of the future out of her head. She felt sick when the movements started—the tugging and sliding of her insides felt like a punishment. She watched Simi watching her grow, and when she let Simi place a hand on her moving belly, she wished fervently that the roles were reversed. After a while, the other women

around her noticed, and that was a relief. They offered to help carry water and sent their own children to collect wood for Leona's fire. And so it settled in—the silence, the forced ignorance. Leona worked constantly: watching the people around her and taking careful notes. The people in the village knew that she was there to observe their culture and way of life so she could write about them, maybe help them with the grazing problem. They knew her research meant she observed them and wrote in the notebook she always had with her, and that she asked questions incessantly about everything she saw. Leona began to draft what she planned to turn into her book, an academic study of the shifting cultural norms of the Loita Maasai brought on by laws limiting their nomadic heritage. She concentrated all her efforts on looking outward, and purposely pushed away what was happening inside.

That's why her baby was born in the way of Maasai babies—in her dim *inkajjik*, the small hut made from thin branches covered with mud and dung. Only the embers in the fire pit lighted the birth, and when the baby's eyes opened, they opened to a halo of wood smoke. The first face the baby saw was brown and wrinkled and adorned with strings of beads sewn onto strips of leather. The first sounds she heard were the women ululating four times to alert the village to the birth of a girl, their calls echoed by the lowing of cows.

Three days after the baby was born, Leona was curled around the infant on her bed. She was still so tired. She must have dropped off because the sound of a car engine and the shouts of people greeting one another outside slipped through her sleep. She lay still, for a moment forgetting everything, and grasped at the feeling of peace. It evaporated the moment she recognized one of the voices outside. When the tall blond man dipped his shoulders and neck to fit through her little door, she wasn't altogether surprised. If he heard the story of an American giving birth, he'd know who it was. A white woman having a baby

in a Maasai village would be big news. There was nobody else it could be. That he came, though, shocked her. She assumed he'd avoid further contact, eschew responsibility. But there he was, and for a moment Leona was stunned into silence.

"How are you?" he said. His English words, though flattened by his British-Kenyan accent, were startling in their familiarity. Leona tried to discern his reaction to the birth from his voice, whether or not he was angry. She concentrated hard, but her vision felt fuzzy and her thoughts flipped too quickly to pin down and consider. He was so handsome, and she remembered how her body stretched toward him that night, like a plant craving light. Even now, a part of her pulled toward him. She thought of how it felt to be pressed into him, how her head had spun with alcohol and need and how she'd wanted him, and how he'd wanted her, too. But the person she was that night in the Chabani Guest House, the woman who'd used flowery shampoo and worn her tightest jeans, the woman who had not walked away when the blond stranger spoke to her...that wasn't the real Leona. It wasn't her, she reminded herself as she looked up at the man. Her cheeks reddened and she wished, for the millionth time, that she could erase the previous months and erase that night and erase that rare, stupid version of herself.

The man leaned down and studied the sleeping baby.

"A girl?" he whispered, and reached out as if he wanted to touch the baby with his fingertips to check if she was real, but he stopped before finger met cheek. He glanced at Leona's face and then away again. She couldn't read him. He folded his lanky body and knelt on the dirt floor next to where she lay, up on the raised bed of rawhide stretched and dried to stiffness on a frame of sticks.

Watching the man now, here, in her home, Leona realized that although she had no idea what he was called, she knew a lot of other things about him. He'd grown up on a cattle ranch in Solai—close to Maasailand—and had a profound understand-

ing of the Maasai and a fluency in their ways. He knew many of the elders in Leona's manyatta. This was what had impressed Leona the night they met and caused her to feel that unfamiliar yearning stretch through her. He made her feel comfortable, so she didn't hesitate when he gently picked her hand up off the bar and told her to follow him to his room. She liked his coarse blond hair and his sunburned, peeling arms that wrapped around her in the night, and his wide, calloused fingers rough on her breasts. While it was dark and they were breathing together that night, she let herself think about how it might be to have a man of her own—one she wanted—to lie with every night. She hadn't wanted that before, but under the darkness of that night the thought was as exciting as it was terrifying.

In the weeks after she'd met him, though she knew she'd been clear to him, brutally so, perhaps, Leona found herself hoping through the hot, still days. She couldn't shake the suspicion that something was different. In the golden evenings when the sun pulled colors out of the sky and turned the landscape soft and blue, she scanned the horizon around the manyatta for the tell-tale clouds of dust a Land Rover would make if it were hurtling up the track toward her.

She hated herself a little more each day when it grew dark without him coming. And she hated him for causing her to hope that he'd ignore the way she'd brushed him off in Narok and come find her, anyway. The multiplying cells inside of her—his baby—had nothing to do with her confusing feelings about the man himself. This was her usual pain: wanting to be seen and loved but being utterly unable to let herself allow it. She accepted being alone, she liked it, but there was the occasional wondering. How would it be to share a life with a man? Maybe with this man? How would it feel to see him and to allow herself to be seen? Each evening when he didn't appear, she nursed her disappointment by listing the reasons it was better to be alone. She knew them by heart—and she knew that

however many items she listed, there was really only one reason: her own fear. This made her hate herself, too.

The dust gathered in her hair and made her itch, but she didn't go back to Narok to shower. She lived with it, like the Maasai did. She was adjusting, she convinced herself, to the life of an embedded anthropologist. When she really understood she was pregnant, and it was long after she could do anything about it, she felt too paralyzed to make the effort to find out who the man was, exactly, and to let him know. She couldn't imagine the conversation they'd have to have, or the decisions they'd have to make. It was too much. She told herself over and over again that she didn't want a relationship, she preferred being in a place where everyone was different from her, where she could restrict her interactions and be just an observer. The man—the baby's father—wouldn't allow her to limit herself. He would require more than she felt she knew how to give. More than she wanted to give. Intimacy was a risky thing.

Now, here he was.

A Maasai woman, squatting in the shadows by the low embers of the fire pit, reached out and handed him a chipped enamel cup of chai. He took it and thanked her in Maa. He looked perfectly relaxed, happy even, to be there. Leona was grateful Simi had gone to the river; surely she would have noticed Leona's discomfort. Surely she would have fit the pieces of the puzzle together. And what then? Leona felt a sudden anger burn in her chest—here was another man who walked in without permission, who settled in her space with no regard to whether she wanted him there or not.

"Were you going to tell me?" the baby's father asked now.

Leona shut her eyes tightly. She answered in Maa.

"Go away. It's not your child."

"That's bullshit, and we both know it." He paused, then spoke so quietly Leona could barely hear him. "I didn't have a good father myself, but I think I'd like to try to be one." His

voice cracked slightly. “Whether or not you want me in your life, the girl deserves a father in hers.”

“You had a shitty father? Well, so did I,” she said. “What makes you think you’d do a better job?”

She saw the man wince. His expression hardened. She knew she’d hit a nerve—she’d hurt him. She wasn’t happy about that, but she sensed a shift in his attitude and felt relief. If she had to hurt him in order to get him to leave her alone, so be it.

To her surprise, he spoke again. “Give me a chance to be a better father than mine, or yours, apparently.”

She felt hemmed in, strangled. Why wouldn’t he just go? Like a trapped animal, she bit hard. “A father is the last thing this baby needs. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you to know, because I don’t want her to suffer through a terrible childhood like I did. You’re not going to change my mind.”