

# It's Not Always a Happy Ending

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The Daily Reader, A Commuter's Library

## Table of Contents

### Around the Block4

Take a quiet ride with Henry and learn all about his neighbors and neighborhood. He will describe a neighborhood everyone has seen before. Learn why the neighborhood is so quiet today.

### Dolly's New Job12

Dolly answers an ad for a nanny position in the local paper. It says short term and in her current state of affairs, short term works fine. However, she is not prepared for what is in store for her. The longer she is there the harder it is to keep her secret and feelings at bay. The lines of business and pleasure have begun to cross.

### Finding Augustus44

Augustus has never been great at finding, let alone keeping a girlfriend. He finally has found someone he is very fond of only to find out it's not going to happen. During a drive to work one day he decides to take a spontaneous trip to nowhere in particular to clear his mind and try to move on. Along the way, he finds that there is a lot more to life than working.

### I'm Not Invisible79

Trying to break out of your shell is hard to do when no one even notices you exist to begin with. Who will notice her changes? Who will care? Is she even capable of doing it? Time and a few turbulent moments will prove to her one way or another.

### It Started on Campus101

Everyone deserves a chance to find out what they want in life. On occasion, life throws a hiccup and a person has to adjust their objectives to meet the same end goal. In this case, an education.

Penelope's hiccup came in the form of a little boy named William. Together with her best friend Vivian they forge forward in achieving their college education and a few other life lessons along the way.

### Lizzy's Adventures130

Lizzy starts off on her new venture with the thing she promised herself she would do a long time ago, a good relaxing message. A new chapter for her, however, it quickly becomes a continuation of an old chapter she put in the back of her mind, and her heart. Monroe.

### Maryanne's Reflections150

Fulfilling her husband's dying wish is a race against time. With the help of some good friends and a lot of faith Maryanne finds a way to pull it together, the rest is up to fate. The strength of a hurricane is needed and the speed of a tornado. Breaking barriers is never easy. Forgiving oneself has never meant so much

### Mabell's List172

Maybell is a real planner, from the time she was a teen she had her whole life planned out. Life, on the other hand had a different list for her to follow. When Maybell looks at her life now she is not sure she has been successful or a complete failure.

### Mismatched201

Society makes a check list of the perfect features a person should have. People have erroneously decided what is socially accepted and what is not. However, sometimes fate and genetics, let's not forget them, play a part in who receives what features. But it is these people whose features don't match societal norms, that have a big choice to make, either suffer their whole lives, or make the best of it. Gilly has tried to get past the snickers behind her back, but even as an adult, they follow her. Herbert, on the other hand has embraced his out of the norm features as part of what makes him unique. Can these two societal misfits find their way to happiness?

### Odd Friends215

Friendships come in all shapes and sizes. Katie begins to realize that her newest and closest friend she has ever had in her life is old enough to be her father. He accepts her for who she is regardless of her past. Nat too has found the woman he has been looking for, only it's not for him.

### Photo Shoot243

Through tragedy a friendship emerges. Fear and self-worth prevent anything from developing though. Can Tanya and Rene see what is right in front of them? Will past scars continue to shine or can this friendship help them fade?

### The Cottage268

Caitlin has built a business for herself with a little help from her father. She has never taken any time to discover herself until she is given an assignment by a mystery client. In one day, Caitlin's world will change dramatically and quickly and so will the lives around her.

### The Gift285

A family is in turmoil, sadness surrounds the house but everyone is pushing through and going on with their daily lives as best as they can. Jo wakes up one day and to find out she has been given a very special gift. Watch how the rest of the family is impacted by this gift.

### The Night of a Full Moon303

Petunia has been getting ready for the next stage in her life, motherhood. She lives on her own and has created a wonderful life for herself. It may be different from the rest of her community but she likes it. However, tonight is about to change all that she has thought to be true.

### Timmy and Kim's Longest Year317

Timmy and Kim live together with their mom. They go to school, have friends, love basketball and enjoy picnics and ice cream. Only Kim is also a frequent visitor to the free medical clinic. Her friendship with Robert is put through the hardest test ever one night. Protection and safety doesn't always come easy for Kim. Will reaching out to her father cause more harm than good?

### Around the Block

Take a quiet ride with Henry and learn all about his neighbors and neighborhood. He will describe a neighborhood everyone has seen before. Learn why the neighborhood is so quiet today.

Hi, my name is Henry, want to ride around the block with me? I'll show you around. My neighborhood is great, everyone knows each other here. The blocks are long so this may take a while, hope your legs won't get tired. I live right here on this corner house – it's a great starting and ending place for a ride. First house we see on our right is my next-door neighbor, Mr. Johns. His lawn, as you can see, is trimmed to perfection, flowers are all in rows, and shutters are in tip-top shape. "A man's home is his castle." It's an old phrase he uses every time I ask him why he works so hard on his house. He is an ex-marine and keeps himself and his family in shape as well. He fixes my bike and helped me make my first go-kart last year. His kids are all older than me so he calls me his second chance to get it right. Mom doesn't mind because my dad's out of the picture, died a few years ago.

Now, as we pass his house you can tell how well kept the rest of the neighborhood is too. Mr. Johns sets a high standard and he uses his spare time to help all the neighbors on this side of the block to maintain the same standard. He has spent whole weekends helping out everyone around. I think it keeps his mind off the fact that his kids have all moved out now. The last one left before spring. His wife grows the biggest garden in town too. She loves to share her bounty too. She makes the best pie you ever tasted. Any kid who comes to help her husband either at her house or their own is deserving of a pie. So, needless to say, we all work on our lawns. Mr. Johns says it's a good skill to know and that we will thank him when we are older. The reward is certainly worth the sweat. Mrs. Johns can even make vegetables taste good. You should come back around harvest time, you won't believe your senses.

Across the street you can see the Langly brothers sitting out on their porch chairs. Probably drinking iced tea and arguing over last night's game. I try not to wave to them anymore when I ride by. They think a wave means you want to come over so they stand up and wave you over. The problem is they usually ask you to pick sides on whatever it is they are arguing about. I don't even understand what they are saying or why there is even an argument, so I've learned to not wave anymore. A headshake in their direction elicits a "Hello" and that's good enough for me. Don't get me wrong, they are very nice people, I've just learned how to work with them. Before I did I was losing whole afternoons at a time trying to figure out what they were saying.

Be careful!! That's - 'Ole Bessie' -, she's the largest oak in our whole town, her roots have pushed up some of the sidewalk here so we have to go down Ms. Hazel's driveway onto the street until we pass her. Sometimes I get off my bike here and walk the bike over the sidewalk bumps so I can marvel at how big she is. Ms. Hazel named the tree after her own mom who used to live with her. Ms. Bessie was so quiet but incredibly strong. When she passed on, all the people she touched over the years came back. Ms. Hazel said it's like a tree that grows strong and gives so much to everyone that at some point people start giving back to the tree. People care for a tree as they would a child. Watch to make sure the roots are firmly in the ground and water and feed it to make sure it reaches its full potential. Every fall those new parts leave and go off to do what they were meant to do. In the spring, new ones come along and give the tree another chance to share its

goodness. That is how Ms. Bessie was, no matter who moved out or into the neighborhood, she took you under her wing and made sure you were taken care of. Mr. Johns was terribly upset when she passed. He was one of her first saplings, she used to say.

People still miss her and will leave messages on this tree with sticky notes. Somehow these notes are always gone the next day, but never blown around the yard. I think Ms. Bessie reads them. I've left her messages too, asked her to watch out for my Dad and Grandma. Do you want to leave a message? No? Ok, but if you don't mind I'm going to go say hi to Old Bessie up close for a second. Besides, for some reason my legs are feeling kind of heavy and need a rest. I don't know why either, we are about to turn the first corner, I'm never tired here. All the same, it will only take a moment....

Thanks for waiting, I see you like to smell Mrs. O'Grady's flowers too. They are pretty special, prize winners you know. I'm sorry I took so long I get mesmerized by Bessie's beauty and my legs are still feeling kind of funny. No worries, let's get to the corner, I want to show you something really unbelievable. Stop right after we turn and look across the street

Do you see it? Have you ever seen something so strange in your life? That's Boris's house over there. Boris goes to my school, nice guy, it's his folks that keep everyone talking, they are some kind of modern hippies or some such thing. Their house has those rectangle panels on the roof to collect energy from the sun and yes, that is grass on top of the other part of the roof, something to do with insulation and natural resources. I never understood it much. Boris says it works for his parents and they don't ask him to cut it so he doesn't mind so much but then again, he also doesn't have too many friends over for fear they will think he is nuts too. They pay someone special to come take care of the maintenance on the roof's grass. Some springs his mom even plants flowers and you can see them from all the way over here. His mom once told me, "It's better to eat off the land than to put it in a can." I'm not sure I totally understand her but she always has a smile on her face so it's hard to think anything bad about her for too long. Boris never had cold cereal until he slept at my house one night. Boy did his mom go nuts, thought we were poisoning him with all those unnatural sugars and chemicals, not to mention the fats. She even mentioned some other things I've never even heard of. So now when he comes over, she sends him with his own food, which he dutifully eats and then has a second meal with us to - 'make his taste buds awaken' - as he says. He is a good son, many others would throw out the stuff they brought.

Hey, look over here, the triplets are at it again. They love playing in the mud and their parents say it's healthy for them, so they turn on the hose and fill the same spot with water until there is enough mud to play in. They will be out there for hours making mud sculptures. They make all kinds of sculptures, sometimes they leave them out there until the next rain washes them away. This is not one of Mr. John's favorite lawns as you've probably guessed. Good thing it's around the corner so he doesn't have to see it every day. When they are done, their mom will come outside and hose them off before she lets them back inside the house. She will take pictures of their work too. Mrs. Shephard, their neighbor, is not as fond of this game as the mud invariably gets on her lawn as well. Mrs. Beagly always brings her one of her prize-winning specialty breads which seems to smooth over the situation each time. What a great funny friendship isn't it?

Wow, it must be hotter than I thought, I feel my head dripping terribly, I must look like a mess to you. No? Well thank you that's very kind. If you don't mind I need to slow down for a minute and catch my breath. I don't know about you but today I seem tired. This part of the block is usually the easiest as it goes downhill all the way to the next corner. I usually coast on down but for some reason today I don't feel as in control as usual. You don't mind do you? Wow, you're a very understanding friend, thanks. How long do you think you will be around? Oh, not sure yet huh? That's ok, we'll make the best of it in the meantime.

Here comes Mike with his truck, we can go get ice cream and sit on Mr. Grange's porch to eat it. He always lets the kids rest here for ice cream as long as we remember to bring him a creamsicle too. Mike stops his truck in front of this house every day, kind of like a predictable bus stop. He wants to make sure everyone gets a chance to find him. He usually waits a good half hour here and wouldn't you know it, half the neighborhood comes by during that time. Doesn't look like a lot of people are around today, that's good for us-we can have our first pick.

Did Mike's face look worried to you? I hope he is ok. The triplet's mom also looks different today. Maybe this heat is getting to other people as well. Let's go sit down. Oh, wait let me deliver Mr. Grange's ice cream first. That's weird, no one is home. What should I do with it? You're right, we'll have to share it, can't leave it sitting out here in this heat. This porch is great, come look with me, you can walk around the whole house and never leave the porch. Some grown up once told me it is called a Victorian-style porch, I like to call it fun. Mr. Grange is a fireman and also works on the volunteer ambulance corps in town. He is a local hero, he even delivered Ms. Patty's baby before her husband had a chance to get home to take her to the hospital. So the baby's nickname is "Little Al".

If you look to your right you can see the next turn coming up. We have about seven houses left and then we will turn again. Sitting on this porch you can see a fenced in yard over to the left. That's Sammy's house, he is another kid our age but he doesn't go to our school. The fence is there so he can't get out and get lost. Sammy is in a wheelchair and he likes have adventures so he once took himself for a ride around town and the whole police precinct was out looking for him. So, for his own safety the town got together and helped his parents set up his yard so he would not want to leave. They didn't want him to not have any fun so they built a kind of an obstacle course in the back yard to keep him busy. Some of the kids who have skateboards come over and play with him. It opened up his life a bit, gave him a chance to make all kinds of friends. He goes to a school in another town, one that is made to accommodate his chair and other needs. My school is an old one and only has steps everywhere. Sometimes he comes to Mr. Grange's with me to have his ice cream. We tell jokes the whole time, he has the best one liners. You should meet him some day.

Ready to go? Let me check the door again, seems odd that no one is home here. Actually, for a regular evening it seems quiet all around. I wonder where everyone is? Whoa, I stood up way too fast, my head is spinning. No one answering still, guess he is working today. I still feel out of breath a bit but the rest of this part of the block is downhill so I'm sure I will perk up soon. As we ride this way you can see all the new saplings that were planted by the town. Many of the old trees

had some infestation of bugs and had to be taken out so now we have these small ones. Coming up on your right you can see the oldest house in town. Mr. Packard lives there, he is a third generation Packard who has lived there. It's not a big house but it sure is pretty. Rumor has it that it was built for a vacation home for one of our presidents. Can you picture that?! Living on the same block as a president of your country, must have been a sight huh? All those secret service people hanging around your street. I've only met Mr. Packard once, he came to our school to talk about the history of our town. I guess he is a good source. His grandpa was one of the first people on the town board to decide where to put buildings like the library and hospital and such. He had old maps of town that didn't even include our whole block. Imagine that huh?

Weird how quiet things are today, I thought I heard a siren a while back but since then nothing. No one seems to be out. Maybe we are crazy for riding in this heat. Let's pull into the next house and use their hose to get a drink, maybe get some water on our heads under the helmets to help cool us off. No, no one minds here. We are all like family, everyone looks out for everyone else. It's a great place, one where you know you will always be safe and always be cared for. OOOOO, that's cold water today. Feels good running down my back though, adds a bit of relief to my headache as well. Not sure if my helmet is too tight or what but I sure am off today. Next time you come I'm sure I will be much better and we can do the whole ride with no stops. Ok, maybe we can stop by Mike's truck again. Ready to move on? Me too, but slowly. Let's get to the end of this part of the block and you will see the library across the street. It's great having one so close. You want to go first this time? Stop at the corner, I'll be right behind you but be careful the hill is quicker than it looks.

This part of the block has the most children on it. That's why if you go to the library during story time there are no seats available. The librarian lets us big kids sit up on tables or has us put one of the young kids on our laps. You can see each yard has a lot of playing equipment. Some have basketball hoops, one or two have nets in the back for racket games, I think there is even one with a pool, and so many of them have colorful riding toys sprawled out all over the place. So you might want to be careful there isn't anything on the sidewalk before riding, I like to call this my own personal obstacle course. When I'm having a good day I challenge myself to go as much as I can without hitting something. I think the farthest I've gone is four straight houses. It can be tricky here, sometimes things shoot out at you because people are playing. I used to have a friend on this part of the block but they moved away. You would have liked him too, we used to do homework together all the time, now he lives in Seattle. We write to each other a lot and I saw him last summer because he came to visit his grandparents and other family members. I think he will be back this summer too; you want to come back then? I'll let you know when he is coming for sure.

See that pink house? You want to hear why it's pink? There used to be a very nice old couple who lived there, they loved to take walks. Then something happened to the old man, I think he had a stroke or something. Anyway, he started to walk again but would end up on different people's front porches so the family painted it a color he would always remember. There have been two families who have lived there since but no one wants to paint it. It's become kind of a marker for some people. It's right in the middle of the block, almost exactly and people use it for reference, even the people who live there. The newest people are the Smyths. They have barbeques all the time, and invite everyone around who wants to come. One time they slipped a flier into everyone's mailbox—it was a grand ole time. Their immediate neighbors even brought out their grills to

accommodate everyone who showed up. Do you have anything like that there where you live? No? Well, it's not like we have it all the time; but when it happens it's a lot of fun.

To your left you will see another blue house with beautifully sculpted trees. That is the Barker's house. Mr. Barker is an artist so he uses his lawn to show off his latest work. He buys trees and ivy so he can mold them into what he wants it to look like. He will add all kinds of things to it too but I don't like those kind they look unnatural. One time he went snooping through everyone's recycling cans and pulled out all kinds of stuff – next thing we know we can see our own garbage being displayed in some funky fashion. His wife is a schoolteacher at a place that doesn't even have an art class. Kind of funny. Isn't it.

We know we have come almost to the end of this part of the block when we see the white house. No, the outside isn't white, but everything else is. The people who live there own white cars, white bikes, their dog and cat are both white and my friend went inside once and said all their furniture is white as well. So we came to call it the white house. I've met the misses once when she was out gardening but never really had a chance to speak with her or her husband. They moved in about five months ago. My mom met them and said they're are no different than any of the other characters who live on our block.

Ah, my favorite house on the whole block, the one that is two houses from the corner, on our side of the street. See it? Yeah, that's right, the one with the green door. This is Mr. Grey's house, he lives there with his five children, his mother and his sister. His wife died last year and that is when his sister moved in. She is a bit crabby for my liking but the kids love her so I guess that is what matters. The door was painted green because his wife wanted it to be. One day she said to him, she wanted their house to stand out somehow but not be gaudy. So, green it was. Besides that touch of eccentricity, the rest of the house reminds me of something you would see in a movie. All the right touches, everything in its place all the time, it's almost too quiet. This is the house where all the action in a movie would happen. It's so unassuming. The back yard is a bird's paradise, full of bird houses and bird baths. They must have a dozen of each. Their kids play in the front yard a lot because of it.

When the kids are out, I like to stop by and play with them. They have the most imaginative games you can think of. I don't mind playing "pretend" with them because they make it so different from anyone else's version. One time we even got the mailman to take his break and play with us. However, as you can see, no one is outside here today either. What a crazy day, I'm not sure I've never seen our block so quiet. Maybe you can come again another day when there is more activity.

Well, now comes the hard part. Making it up the last leg of the trip. This hill is so big we won't be able to see my house until we are half way up the hill. Are you ready? No, I don't mind waiting a few minutes. Do you want to rest under Molly's almond tree? Molly goes to school with me too. She is one year older than us though, but she likes to ride bikes with me a lot and many times we even share our lunches and snacks in school. Her parents work so much all she has is her

babysitter to keep her company. Melissa, yeah that's the babysitter's name. Molly is the oldest of four children. Her siblings go away to friends a lot which is why they aren't here today, that's my guess.

Did you hear another siren? Maybe it is me, oh well. As we work hard to get up this hill you will see that many people on this side of the block are also crazy about keeping their lawns perfect. This side of the block has a garden contest each spring and summer. Judges come by and vote in the spring and then come by twice during the summer. Everyone is graded on a point system and the results get printed in the community paper. It doesn't get you much except bragging rights for the year. Mr. Henly has won the past two years in a row. He says his secret is to match the flowers to the house so it looks "even more natural than nature itself." He is so funny, he makes everyone laugh all the time. He spoke at the July 4th fair across town and had everyone rolling on the floor. You should have seen it. Not a dry eye in the park because we were all laughing so dang hard.

I don't know about you but my head is really starting to pound right now and my legs feel like jelly. Can we please stop at the next house and ask for more water? Yes, we can use the hose again, that's fine with me. Although my head feels so drippy that I'm not sure I will be able to tell what's water and what's sweat. We can stop at the next house, it's about half way up and they have a hose in the front so we don't have to go too far for the water. How do I know that? I come over a lot to play in the sprinkler. Like I said, we all know everything about each other around here. Mr. Morris likes it best when we spend some time in back and some in front so he gets his whole lawn watered while we play.

Also, Mr. Morris put in this really great hammock on his front lawn. I've been caught napping there once or twice. Want to lie in it with me? It's so big three people can lie in it. I'll go first so you can see how to get in. Leave your bike next to mine by the tree there. See? Just what the doctor ordered. A bit of rest to catch up to ourselves. We'll only stay about 10 minutes, and then I think I'll be OK to trek up the rest of this hill.

Let's get one more drink before we get going. We are about half way up but the second half is not as steep as the first. Ready? OK, so let's start up again. I'm fine why do you ask? Yes, I do feel a bit wobbly on my bike all of a sudden, but we'll manage, don't worry about me, I've made this trip a hundred times already.

I hear voices up ahead, do you? Hey, what's everyone doing at the top of the hill? That sure explains a lot doesn't it. I see the ambulance too. Hey, that's my mom on the floor!!!! She's bending over and yelling something. We've got to go full speed ahead, she must be hurt. "I'm coming Mom! I promise!" Oh, I sure hope she is OK, I don't want to live with my uncle. What am I saying, she is fine, must be all those people are there to help. I see Mr. Grange, and I see Mike there too but why is everyone looking down shouldn't they be looking at her?

What? You don't think they are there for her? Why not? Hey, where did you go? Oh, man I can't go look for him now. He can't get lost, I'll find him later, I've got to get to my mom. I hear her. "Mom! I'm coming" Why isn't she answering me? Why can't she see me calling? I'm pedaling as fast as I can I can't get there any faster, dang hill.

Everyone is crying and looking around. I'm going to dump my bike here and run the rest of the way, it will be quicker. Mr. Morgan won't mind if I leave my bike here for a little while. Let me through, move out of the way!! Why can't I push through these people? Why is Mom crying so much? Hey, whose red Corvette is this anyway? I don't recognize this from anyone around here and why is it halfway onto the sidewalk?

My head is killing me, my legs are like jelly and I can't get my mom to hear me. Stop crying everyone!!! I'm trying to get my mom to hear me. Oh, man, one more scream and then I'm going to knock on some heads.

"MOM!!!"

"Oh, my baby, you're back! Oh, honey, I'm so happy to hear you and to see your eyes open. You gave us all quite a scare young man."

"Henry, it's Mike, can you tell me what hurts?"

"My head and my legs. Mom, where is my friend? I was riding around the block and as I came up this side I saw you on the ground. Are you ok?"

"Honey, you've been in an accident. There are no friends. Some foolish guy in a corvette hit you and threw you onto Mr. Morgan's lawn. I'm on the floor because I'm holding you. Mike?"

"He'll be ok, probably trauma."

"My friend, where is he? We rode together, I showed him the whole block." Oh, there you are, this is my mom. You knew that? How did you know? Why don't you introduce yourself? You can't? I don't understand I've been talking to you all this time and you.....

"Henry, we are going to bring you to the hospital now. On three everyone, 1, 2, 3, lift. Your mom is coming with us"

"Henry! We got to go everyone! Clear out"

I hear the sirens again do you? Are you going to stay with me? Good, I like you too.

## Dolly's New Job

Dolly answers an ad for a nanny position in the local paper. It says short term and in her current state of affairs, short term works fine. However, she is not prepared for what is in store for her. The longer Dolly works there, the harder it is to keep her secret and her feelings at bay. The lines of business and pleasure have begun to cross.

Dolly finds herself in quite a predicament right now. After being kicked out of her boyfriend's apartment, she crawled back into the hole that's supposed to be an apartment she kept payments on, 'just in case' because her girlfriends all told her to. She was hoping that she would be invited to stay with him by the time her lease ends. However, this is not the case and now she sits in the dark with only the light from the street outside shining in on her corner table so she can read the newspaper scouring it for jobs. Her current job is only enough to keep her in this hole but she needs to better her life in many ways, financially is only the first step. She has a lot to think about and not staying here has become the biggest and most immediate issue.

Past the regular want ads in the local paper, Dolly sees a three line ad that she almost misses. "Nanny wanted for short term. Good salary, great child." Dolly finds the email address and immediately sends a message to them. "Saw your ad in the paper, I come with years of experience and enthusiasm for children. Please call me as soon as it is convenient for you. My number is 555-THE BEST." Her boyfriend pointed this out to her one night when he was feeling particularly romantic. She figures, if they can call her, they understand English and that is important to her because she does not know another language.

Dolly looks around her room and decides to unpack the one suitcase she had at his apartment. Each week she would stop by this place and exchange clothes so she didn't have to wear the same things over and over. She puts the laundry in her bag so she can bring it in tomorrow and continues to put away the rest of the clothes. She spends some time on cleaning up her whole place. "Maybe if I make it more presentable I will not hate it as much." She says out loud to no one. It only takes another hour or so since the whole place is smaller than the bedroom she grew up with. As she looks around the room, satisfied about the tidiness, she goes to take a shower.

Her mother would kill her if she saw how she lives, but Dolly wants to be independent from her parents, she has always wanted to be on her own, live by her own rules and most importantly, live on her own money. Her friends in college didn't have anyone paying their bills and they did fine,

they were all happy to take out loans to achieve their ultimate goal of a degree. Part of the reason Dolly lives the way she does is because she worked out a payment schedule to pay back her parents for her education. At first her father thought she was nuts but when she explained she wanted to pay her own way and not rely on them anymore, he helped her work out a payment schedule she could afford. Between that and rent, there is not much left from an internship's pay. She is really hoping this nanny position pays more. Even if it's only 15% more, she will be able to breathe better, maybe not move out but at least breathe. With the extra she will put it away and continue to live simply, she is going to need some savings sooner than later.

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This house is nice, it is a modest four bedroom colonial with a wraparound porch. Almost as if the previous owners had Victorian envy. Victor is partial to the study on the first floor. The house also has a large dining room, a sizeable living room and a very functional kitchen where you could sit 12 people if you had to easily. He closes the door to Princess Tina's room and walks quietly downstairs.

Victor loves his little girl, he knows he needs to stop calling her princess all the time but it's a hard habit to break. The minute she was born he held her and said "Hello Princess". The nurses in the hospital loved it and called her that as well. He shakes his head to erase the rest of the memories of that day.

Victor walks into his study, one of the few rooms that he has totally unpacked since arriving here a couple of months ago. He managed to get this room done first because he has to work from home from time to time. He even has to entertain a client or two and thanks to the wrap around porch there is a door right to the study so no one has to walk into the house and see all the boxes. He can keep his personal life and his business life separate.

The living room has a couch and a chair plus book shelves in it but nothing on them yet. The dining room also only has the furniture and a dozen or so boxes of various sizes and shapes. The kitchen is standing room only with all the boxes and plastic containers. He shakes his head, "This will wait." He says out loud.

His phone buzzes that an email has come through. Victor reads it and smiles. "Well, if this person is creative enough to have that phone number than at least we know she will be good with Tina's creative nature." Again he speaks out loud to no one. Victor calls her back, to his disappointment he gets a voice mail and leaves her a message as to where to meet him tomorrow. He will decide in person it's the only way.

Then he sees another message he missed, probably while putting Tina to sleep. This one does not comfort him at all.

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Dolly gets out of the shower and finally feels refreshed. She sits down on her bed and picks up her phone to see if maybe her boyfriend wants her back. 'It can happen' she thinks to herself. But alas, it is not, there is a voicemail though from a number she does not recognize, she will look at it tomorrow. Right now, she is going to bed. Her day has been too stressful to deal with any nonsense.

2:00 am Dolly's phone rings a familiar ring, it takes her a moment to realize it is the sound she assigned to her boyfriend's phone. She pops right up so she doesn't sound sleepy and answers the phone. "Hello?" she asks. "Hello!!" this time she calls into the phone. By the third "Hello!!" she realizes it is his butt that called her and not him. "You're a damn jackass!! Whomever you are screwing right now I hope she hears me. HE WON'T WEAR A CONDOM!!!! She screams at the top of her lungs hoping that someone heard her and she interrupted an intimate moment. Also hoping no one in her building heard her so they don't call the cops on her. She forgot how thin the walls are here. Oh well, it's done already if the cops come, they may laugh. Or not.

Now in a huff, she can no longer sleep. She decides this is as good of a time as any to listen to the voice message she forgot about on her phone. "Hello, this is Victor. I'm the one looking for a short term nanny. Please meet me at the Corner Ice Cream Shoppe on Belle Street tomorrow at 2:00pm so we can discuss the position. Thank you."

Oooo, Dolly loves that ice cream shop. "This may be a good thing after all. As long as the pay is more than what she is getting now, otherwise it may not be worth it." Dolly shakes her head, she has to stop talking out loud to herself; people will think she has gone crazy. She looks around her room. All of her belongings are stuffed into this 8' x 8' room. She has enough walking space to not bump into things but only barely. Her parents won't let her come back home because they say she lives a wild life and it's a bad influence on her brothers. If only they knew what was going on now. "HA!!" she calls out. Picturing her mother's face at the news. This gives her a minute of laughter and she proceeds to finish her room and setting it up properly. It may be cramped and damp and ugly from the outside but the inside is her home and she is now determined to make it so, such that it is.

At 6:00 am Dolly proceeds to go through her regular morning routine and prepares herself for her day of slave labor at the Decorators Institute. She has a degree and very good sense of what belongs in each person's house or surroundings but her stupid boss only wants to give her an internship. Little does her boss know how many clients Dolly has worked with under the radar. If she did know, she would be fired for sure. The clients are happy and do not say a word because they are getting her cheaper than they would have to pay the Institute. Dolly knows it's mean but the clients ask and she has a hard time saying no when she knows she can do better for them than the person her boss assigns. For Dolly it's not always about the physical aspects of the room, it's about the personalities. If she doesn't mesh with the client's personality, she won't accept the job, however, if the client doesn't mesh with their own space? Now that's where she comes in and transforms their lives.

She finds a very conservative outfit to wear today because she will be meeting Victor about a possible job. Her current clients have her personal phone number so they will continue to call her and if she is working with Victor she won't have to hide her conversations any more. Plus she might be able to make those business cards she's always wanted to do and start from scratch while doing this short term position. "Ok Dolly, now you're getting ahead of yourself. You don't even have the job yet." She takes a deep breath, looks around her room one more time, very satisfied with the transformation work she has spent hours on and turns to go to work. Locks her door and leaves with a smile. Even though, she should be dead tired from being up since 2:00am.

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Victor waits in the kitchen, he is always the first to arise in the house. Rubin, his butler and Ana the housemaid/nanny finally come up from the basement. There were two very respectable rooms already done in the basement so it made sense to him to allow them to live here with him and Tina so he didn't have to wait on them showing up late anymore, which they tended to do for months up until now. Shortly after they meander upstairs Victor can hear, "Daddy!!" being called from upstairs.

He runs upstairs to grab his little girl and bring her to the bathroom in time. Thankful for every day he makes it. While she is there he quickly goes back to check to make sure the bed is dry. "You are a big girl my little princess. Daddy is very proud of you. Would you like to pick out your own dress today?" he smiles at her.

"Done." She tells him.

Victor takes Tina off the potty seat and places her on her step stool so she can reach the water and wash her hands. He waits for her then takes her back to her room so he can help her get dressed. Today she picks out her red dress with green and white polka dots on it and her blue shoes. He knows it does not match but she is proud to pick it out and he lets her. Besides, she isn't even in school yet so it really doesn't matter how she expresses herself.

"Breakfast princess." He holds up her hands and she tries to jump right into his arms from the floor. Victor picks her up and they skip down the stairs; once there, he places her down so she can run into the kitchen like she enjoys doing. He follows slowly.

"Today I will be interviewing a new nanny. I'm hoping it will work out so you two can continue doing what you need to do without the added interruptions as you asked. I hope this makes you happier so we can all get back to the business at hand. Raising Tina in the best environment." Victor says to his butler and housemaid.

Rubin and Ana look at each other and then back at him. "Yes sir, that is most agreeable. Thank you." They say in unison. "Will she be living here as well?" Ana asks with some nerves in her voice. Victor notes the nerves but decides he is imaging it.

"There is no need for that. She will come before I leave for work and leave when I get home, regardless of time." He said. He has a contract indicating this already. Hoping he will not have to waste time looking for too many people.

"Give Daddy a kiss princess." He says to Tina.

Tina looks up from her breakfast to hug and kiss him. "Good day." She says in her toddler voice. "Good day to you too." Victor answers back.

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Victor's day flies by. He has had this project to do for weeks now and it is finally coming to the point where he needs to finalize the details for the client. It can take him hours more but he put into his mind already that today is the day he has to finish. Victor notices his phone buzzed three times in the past 15 minutes. He finally picks it up to hear the message.

"Ok, I get it. You're hiding somewhere to see who walks into the ice cream shoppe, but guess what, my time is money too. If you're not going to show up the least you can do is let me know. This is a bit humiliating and I've had enough of that already, I don't need it from a perfect stranger. I'm leaving in two minutes if you don't show your face. Coward." Victor quickly looks at his watch. It's 2:25. He is never late for an appointment. He calls the number from last night.

"Hello, it's Victor. Wow, you must hate me already. I am never late for an appointment. I pride myself on that. Can you please take a cab, my treat, and meet me at my office. Its 165 Longfellow drive." He waits for an answer.

"How stupid do you think I am? I'm going to catch a cab, have it take me to the swankiest business district in town and I'm supposed to believe you that you'll pay for the cab? Doesn't that sound a bit far-fetched to you? Is this some sort of prank? I need to get back to work, it may not be glamorous but it's still work." she answers, her voice seething.

Victor thinks for a moment, "You are absolutely right. Are you still inside the shoppe?" he asks.

"Yes." She says.

"Take your phone over to the guy behind the counter, Leo. Show him the number and ask him if he believes it to be legit. Will that help you?" he asks, now pacing because he doesn't have time to blow this.

"Fine. Hold on." Dolly walks over to Leo and does as she is asked. "That's Victor's number. Oh, I'm so glad you've met him. Greatest little girl, calls her princess all the time. He moved in about two months ago over on the boulevard. Great guy, oh wait, you're holding the phone, does he want to talk to me?" he asks.

"Do you want to talk to Leo?" she asks softer now

"Tell him I said hi and ask him for two of my usual to go. Then find a cab. Please." He pleads.

"Sure. See you soon." She hangs up.

"Leo, Victor says to give me two of his usual to go and to call me a cab. I'll bring them over to him for you." Dolly says.

"Sure Dolly. Is this business or pleasure?" he asks as he gets to work.

"Business actually, I'm interviewing for the position of nanny." She tells him

"Nanny? I guess it's better than not being happy where you are huh? He is a great guy. Kid is beautiful. Be careful not to fall in love." He says.

"With Victor? Not a chance." She begins.

"No, with Tina, she can twist you around her finger in moment's notice, you won't even know it happens." He smiles at her. "Your cab's outside dear. Have fun. See you back soon." He calls

"Yes, you probably will. Best ice cream I've had since my childhood." She smiles back at him and proceeds out the door to the cab waiting for her. Dotty gives him the address and he speeds off immediately.

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Rubin and Ana are busy when Tina wakes from her nap. Ana runs back upstairs to get her out of bed and into the bathroom quickly. This potty training thing is sure annoying. She is hoping the new nanny works out. She has better things to do than wipe a child's butt 20 times a day. When she is done, she brings Tina back to her room.

She closes the gate on the door. "You stay here and play, I have work to do." She says and leaves her in the room to play by herself.

Downstairs, she says to Rubin, "Man kids are so damn demanding. Good thing she has toys upstairs, can you imagine what it will be like when he eventually unpacks the rest of the house? We'll have to watch her down here too." She says.

"Yeah, and chase after her too. This nanny better be coming tomorrow." He says annoyed at this new development. Rubin and Ana have been with Victor for five years now. They kept the old house in order, dealt with the farce of a marriage and the aftermath of Tina's birth. But dealing with the child is not what they want to do. Either of them.

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"Victor?" Dolly opens the door to his office as she knocks.

Victor looks up and does not recognize the face but sees the bags from Leo. He smiles, at least she is nice to look at and not an old hag he was expecting.

He stands up and extends his hand. "Yes, and you are?" he asks.

"Dolly. Just Dolly" she says.

"Please sit down over there Dolly, I'm almost finished here and we can talk all the same. Can you put my ice cream on the desk there, take one for yourself." He says as his head is already buried in his charts and boards.

Dolly does as she is asked. She has no idea what his usual is but she loves ice cream so how bad could it be? She takes one out of the bag and a spoon. Her eyes begin to water at the sheer size of the bowl she is pulling out. "Do you always eat three scoop sundaes?" she asks.

"Three? Oh, I thought it was four. Well, yes, it's my guilty pleasure. My little girl and I usually share it. She mostly eats the whipped cream and the hot fudge with a little of ice cream." He says while continuing his work.

Dolly digs in, 'hmmm this is damn good' she thinks to herself. She eats in silence for a moment, watching Victor work with meticulous intent.

"About the job." She finally says.

Victor stands up a moment, he walks to his desk and opens his ice cream. "Yes, of course, I'm sorry. I need someone who is untied and willing to work my schedule. I can give you a weekly schedule, that's the best I can do. I need you at the house before I leave for work and not to leave until I get home. I have a housemaid and butler but they are not really child friendly and I need someone to tend to my princess Tina's needs.

She is a creative young thing and needs someone who can allow her to jump on her bed three times when she thinks she is transporting to space. Someone who will color butterflies for hours with her if she chooses and who will allow her to wear polka dots and stripes if she so desires.

She is potty trained although every once in a while I find her bed linens wet when I put her to bed, so I think Ana and Rubin don't catch it. I don't understand that though because she is bone dry all night.

I want your total attention to be on her. The whole time.” He pulls a paper from his back pocket. “Here is the contract, if you are agreeable to this, can you start tomorrow?” Victor takes a breath then a big scoop of his ice cream.

Dolly takes the paper from him. She sits back down and reads it from top to bottom. It’s not that long but it is certainly detailed. The bottom line mentions the salary and she almost falls off her chair, it’s double what she is making now in her internship. She could not only leave her rented room but she may be able to get into an actual apartment building. With her ability to save money, she really thinks this will set her up nicely, at least to start. She will sit down with her friend who does numbers well and work out a saving plan that will enable all she needs. She takes a deep breath.

Dolly looks back up at Victor. “Ok, I can start tomorrow. But before I leave my current position, I really need to know you are serious about this salary.” She says.

“Is it not enough?” he asks.

“I didn’t say that, I want to make sure you are serious is all. I can’t leave one place only to be jerked around in another. There is no gain for me then.” She says in a stern voice.

“This is a binding contract, you could take it to court if I don’t live up to my end of the bargain. As far as I see it, I need you until the Fall when she will be enrolled in a pre-school and aftercare so I can drop her off and pick her up myself. I hope this temporary position will satisfy your needs.” He says.

“It will be fine for me. I am in a career transition time anyway. This will give me enough time to set myself up for afterwards and be in a good place.” She answers.

“Ok, hold on a minute.” Victor goes to the door and calls out to one of the other men in the office, he comes in. “I want a witness that both of us are signing this not under duress or trickery.” He says to her and is the first to sign the paper. Dolly signs it next and then the witness. Victor makes a copy of it and hands her the original.

“I’ll see you tomorrow then, the address is right there.” He points to the top of the page.

"Tomorrow." Dolly says and leaves the office not sure if she should be excited or scared. She decides to walk back to the Institute to tell her boss she is no longer coming in. She needs the time to formulate the words properly. Dolly would love to tell her a few things but she knows if she does she will get herself in occupational trouble. She does not want to start off with a bad name before she even gets going in her career. Dolly decides to simply tell her thank you for all she has learned and that she is moving on. Being that this is an internship, she is not required to give her two weeks' notice.

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Victor stays at work until past 9:00 pm in order to finalize everything for this project. He goes home in a good mood, hoping that Tina might still be up so he can give her a kiss goodnight.

He walks into the house and finds it quiet. He walks into the kitchen and sees that Ana has left him a dinner plate to warm up. He eats in the quiet

Victor spends some time in his study putting together some of the other proposals he has but has been neglecting in order to get today's finished. Then he goes upstairs, kisses his baby goodnight, tucks her in again and goes to sleep.

In the morning, Victor goes straight to Tina's room to wake her up. He wants her up and ready to meet Dolly. When he sees her room in the daylight, he notices that there is a wet ring on her sheets he must have missed when he tucked her in last night. He kisses her awake and she grabs onto his neck and hugs him.

He stands up and hugs her back. 'There is no better love than this', he thinks to himself. "Good morning princess. I have a surprise for you. So let's get up and get moving ok?" She shakes her head into his neck.

He quickly goes through their morning routine, including pulling the sheets off her bed again, he notices that the mattress cover does not seem to be stained so it was probably not a big deal. He won't mention it to anyone.

Tina helps him make her bed and place all the right animals in the right order on her bed, they head downstairs together. Today she wants to be carried into the kitchen. He places her on the counter and offers to make her pancakes, which makes her squeal with delight. She helps set the table, one paper plate at a time, they are the only ones she can reach.

The doorbell rings. He grabs her and runs to the door. They get to the door at the same time

Rubin does. "Good morning Dolly, you're in time for pancakes hope you didn't have breakfast yet." He smiles.

"Dolly!" Tina squeals.

Victor looks at Tina, "No, Tina, Dolly is her name, she doesn't have a new doll for you." He looks at her for understanding. She shakes her head, "nancakes?" she asks her father.

"Yes, let's go eat the pancakes. This way Dolly." The three of them begin to walk towards the kitchen. Rubin clears his throat. Victor looks back at him. "Sorry, Rubin this is Dolly, the new nanny. Her sole responsibility will be to take care of all of Tina's needs, you two can now tend to the house. And this lovely lady is Ana. Ana, Dolly."

Victor puts Tina on her chair at the table and sits down to enjoy breakfast with her. Ana has already started to clean up the mess he made at the stove. She hates when he cooks because she always has the stove and not only the pots to clean. Dolly notices her displeasure very quickly.

She looks around the kitchen and sees it full of boxes. Clean boxes but boxes nonetheless. For lack of any place else to go, she sits next to Tina at the table. "Do you like to play outside?" she asks her.

Victor looks at Dolly with a curious look. "It's cold outside." He says.

"So, it's also sunny, everyone needs sun each day in their life. I assume she has boots and winter clothes doesn't she?" Dolly asks.

"I suppose she does. I only take her from the house to the car when we go out somewhere. If she doesn't have it, you'll have to tell me and I'll make sure to pick it up on the way home." He says. "Ok princess, I have to go to work now. You get to play with Dolly all day ok?" he asks her.

"Good day daddy." She says with a sugar soaked smile.

"Good day princess." He says as he bends down to kiss her head. "I'll be home around 7:00 tonight, please make sure she has already had dinner and bath. I'll put her to bed. It's my favorite time of day." He smiles.

"No problem. Good luck with your presentation today." Dolly says.

Victor turns back to her wondering how she knew it was today but he thought better of asking. He had to go, he waved and walked out of the kitchen.

Ana turns to Dolly, "Keep the child busy and out of my hair. That's your job. Got it." She says in a stern voice.

Dolly, not one to be put in her place happily, stands to show her height is greater than Ana's and looks down at her and says, "Just do your job and don't get in my way." She looks around the room and continues, "I see you have plenty of work to do here. Let's go Tina." She grabs the little girl up in her arms and walks right out of the kitchen with Ana's jaw still dropped open.

Dolly hopes she didn't lose her job by opening her mouth because now she has nowhere to go as she quit the institute. But as far as she can tell, there is not much for a butler and housemaid to do in this house, it's mostly in boxes still. Leo said they moved in only a couple months ago but the looks of it shows it could have been yesterday or at best last week.

"Show me your room Tina." She puts her down and follows the little beauty up the stairs. Leo is right, you can easily fall in love with her. Tina's room is overstuffed with everything a child would need and then some.

She sees a beautiful doll house that is definitely too big for the room. It belongs down in the living room that doubles as a den she saw downstairs. Once in the room, Tina reaches for the gate to close it on herself. Dolly instantly realizes that Ana and Rubin keep this poor girl up in her room all day long.

"No more gate Tina. We are going to play in the whole house today. How about that?" she asks.

Tina jumps into her arms and Dolly willingly picks her up. She looks around the room. "How about we bring the dollhouse downstairs and we make a new home for it?" she is not sure how much an almost three year old understands but this one surely is catching on quickly.

“Downstairs?” she asks as she holds onto what looks like an extension to the house. Must be a garage, Dolly thinks to herself.

“Yes, what else goes with the house? That car?” she points to the left of the house. Tina nods yes. The two of them start to take out all the toys they want to bring downstairs. “Ok you can’t carry this, it’s too big, stay here ok. I’ll be right back.” Dolly tells her.

She lifts the house, which is surprisingly light but bulky and brings it downstairs into the den, she takes a quick assessment and finds the perfect place for it. She runs upstairs and Tina hands her the next couple of pieces to it and she runs back down and places it next to the house. One more trip and she sees Tina has brought out a couple more items. “This downstairs too.” She says to Dolly.

“Ok, but that’s enough for now. Ok? We want to make sure Daddy likes it.” She says to her in an understanding voice. She doesn’t want to use a stern voice with her yet. She needs this job so the last thing she needs is a bad report from the princess.

“Daddy likes camel.” She says.

“If you are sure, then yes we can bring down camel, but now that there are toys down there, let’s go play for a while. Sounds good?” Dolly asks.

“Play!!” Tina yells.

They each take one of the last pieces and proceed downstairs.

Ana and Rubin meet them at the living room entrance. “What are you doing in here?” Rubin asks trying to sound territorial.

“I have access to the whole house and so does Tina, no more locking her in the room with a gate. It will not be happening anymore any day. Is that understood? This child is allowed to live in her whole house. Again, I will say, you do your job and I’ll do mine, which means I do whatever Tina wants. And Tina wants to play down here.” She takes Tina’s hand and walks her over to where she set up the doll house and all its accessories.

Ana and Rubin look at each other and Rubin points to the dining room. Once there he says, "How can we do what we want to do when she can be anywhere at any time. I can't tell Victor that his nanny is doing what he said to do but it's in my way. We're going to have to work around this. We will make sure we aren't in the same room at any given time." He says to Ana

"That may be hard if she plans on floating around all the time, she could be anywhere at any given time, you heard her, she plans on allowing that brat to roam the whole house." Ana says in a fit of anger.

Rubin looks at her, "Ana, it is her house. We've been lucky until now. Dolly is right and you know it. Come on." He pulls her with him back down to the basement.

Tina and Dolly spend so much time playing with the pretend dollhouse and everything with it, she hardly notices the time going by. Her stomach starts to growl and Dolly realizes she hasn't eaten all day. As much as the pancakes smelled good, she didn't want to eat with them the first minute she was there.

"Tina, we have to clean this up before we go get a snack. Let's put it all back into its corner the way you want and then we will go get an apple and some peanut butter if you like." Dolly smiles as the child is thrilled to be given her way to put away her toys.

Tina places each items where she thinks it should go. She takes the camel and puts it in her Daddy's chair and bends down and kisses its head. "I like apples." She says to Dolly, they walk together into the kitchen.

After their snack Ana happens to walk into the kitchen, "Do you know if they have some sort of bag I can pack up a picnic lunch for the two of us?" she asks, hoping she hasn't made an enemy for life.

"A picnic? You know its late February and it's still cold outside?" Ana asks confused.

"Yes, my mom used to always take us out in the winter. We loved it. I think Tina will too. She is healthy and I found her winter snow pants and boots in her room. I found a coat that fits her, gloves and a hat. We will be fine but I may be out for a couple of hours if that's ok with you." She says.

"You go get her ready. I'll pack you both up a lunch. No allergies?" Ana asks with a smirk on her face. "If she is going to take her out every day, they stand a chance of having things back to normal. "She usually naps around 2:00pm you know." She says.

"Oh, that sounds good. We will go get ready now. Thank you Ana." Dolly walks upstairs hand in hand with Tina.

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Before he knew it, this new routine with Dolly around has made everyone happy. His daughter is happy, he is happy; what else could he ask for? He sees Tina blooming even more than before. On nights he comes home later than her bed time there is always a picture from her next to his dinner plate. Often times Dolly stays with him until he finishes his dinner so he does not have to dine alone. He is getting quite spoiled these past couple of months.

Victor's phone rings with that familiar sound. "Hello Mother, how are you today?" he asks.

"How do you always know it's me? Do you cheat and look at the number on your phone?" she asks.

"Never, me? cheat?" he jokes with her, little does she know it's the ringtone that gives her away.

"Well, honey I wanted to remind you that I'm coming out there this weekend and I wanted to know if you need anything from home." She says.

Victor's head begins to spin. He knew she was coming, she told him a couple of months ago but he ignored the warning email. Damn, now he is in trouble. "Mom, I live at home. I no longer live with you, so no there is nothing I need from your house." He says trying to drive home the point for the millionth time that he lives on his own.

There was a pause on the phone, he knows he made her upset but he is tired of the same argument all the time, it has to stop at some point. During this moment, Victor remembers a conversation he had with Dolly one night at dinner, she is a decorator. He needs to get home quickly and get his boxes unpacked, the last thing his mom needs to see is that he has been living in boxes for months now. He is actually surprised Dolly has let him live like this for so long too considering her profession.

“Mom, how about you bring some of your famous chocolate chip cookies to spoil Tina with?” he says hoping it’s a good enough recovery.

“Oh, does she have her father’s sweet tooth?” his mom asks with glee.

“Unfortunately, yes. Bring what you’d like, we can keep them in the freezer and take them out whenever we want or whenever we miss you.” He says this knowing she will bring enough for an army.

“Well, that doesn’t give me a lot of time to bake, but if you insist. Will you send a car dear? Or come yourself?” she asks.

“What time are you landing?” he asks.

“I believe it will be around 4:00 pm.” She answers

“It’s kind of a tough time for me, is it ok if I send a car?” he asks hoping to get out of going to the airport.

“That’s fine, I only wanted to know who to look for. Oh, I better get shopping for ingredients. See you soon!” she says with giddy excitement.

Victor slams his phone down, “Damn!!” He runs out of his office and heads for home. He has to get on Dolly’s good side. He may have to pay her extra but it has to be done. He hopes she is good at what she does.

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Dolly and Tina take their usual walk at the park, no matter how cold, she has brought her outside each day. If it’s too cold they go to an indoor place to walk around and have fun. She has had far too much fun being a mom to this young girl.

She is grateful for this experience, it has shown her that she will ok as a single mom. It is only a matter of time before her baggy clothes give her away, but she is hoping by then her time with the princess will almost be over and no one will care. With warmer weather upon them it's hard to hide behind a big coat, but the funny thing is she wasn't showing then, she is now, at only slightly passed her first trimester. She wears large baggy shirts and sometimes dresses.

Victor's ability to be completely oblivious to the world around him is sure helping her. She is pretty sure Ana and Rubin know and are waiting for the right moment to get back at her. So far, so good but she doesn't want to push her luck so she makes sure to always say good morning to them and thank you for the littlest things they do for her or Tina. Which really isn't much now that she thinks about it.

"How about ice cream today Tina?" Dolly asks her

"Chocolate day." She says.

"Deal, we don't need any silly flavors do we?" Dolly asks, craving the sweet, cold deliciousness served by Leo.

"Good afternoon ladies, what will it be today?" he asks with a smile.

"Chocolate day." Tina says.

"You have it, would you like whipped cream Dolly?" Leo asks.

"Sure, thank you." She says.

Leo smiles at her as if he knows a secret, or is that only Dolly's imagination. Can he see right through her? Before she can allow her mind to go there, her phone rings.

"Dolly, where the hell are you!!!!?????" Victor yells into the phone.

"We are out getting ice cream. We always come out at this time of day and not to worry Tina is

home by nap time." She says with a bit of annoyance in her voice.

"I came home needing you and what do I find?" he pauses a moment, "It's an emergency you need to get home quickly. Tell Leo to put you in a cab home and take it to go. I don't know what to do with myself. Please Dolly." He is pleading now.

"It's no problem, we haven't even started eating; we will be home soon. No worries." Dolly's stomach churns, she is suddenly worried sick about Victor. What could have caused him to react like this?

"Leo, I'm sorry we need this to go. Daddy called Tina, he came home and we aren't there, he wants to see us right away. Can you call a cab Leo?" she says her eyes saying it's urgent even if her voice does not.

Leo looks right at her and shakes his head, "I'll pack a third to go. No problem. You going to be ok?" he asks Dolly.

"I hope so. Not sure what is going on." She answers.

"Call if you guys need me. Victor has my private line." Leo says with concern in his voice.

"Will do, thank you again Leo, for everything." She says with her eyes, thank you for keeping my secret and he nods and sends her and Tina out to the waiting cab.

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A half an hour ago Victor's life was fine, a bit unnerving at times, but it was fine. After speaking with his mother he decided to come home and speak with Dolly about what she can do for him to get ready in five days for his mother.

His logical brain decides to come home and speak with her and maybe have lunch together with his princess. Victor goes over what has transpired since he came home and each time he recalls it, his nerves go up and over the top, his heart rate goes up and all he wants to do is hold his princess for protection and he is also thinking he wants to hold Dolly as well, he is not sure where that is coming from though.

He is pacing in his study when he finally hears, "Daddy ice cream!!" Tina calls to him. He runs out into the foyer and grabs her and holds on for dear life. Then with his other hand he pulls Dolly into him as well and he buries his head into her neck and says, "Thank god you're safe, both of you."

Dolly leans her head onto Victor's because it seems he needs it right now and she allows him to hold her, part of her is enjoying it but she knows she has to break free. Thankfully, Tina beats her to it, "Daddy squeezing!"

Victor releases his daughter and lets her slide down his side to the floor but his other arm is still around Dolly's lower back. "Ice cream Daddy?" Tina holds up her bag and then Dolly follows suit and holds hers up too. "Leo gave us for you as well. Come let's go to the kitchen and sit down, ok?" Dolly starts to walk, Victor doesn't let go of her side as he walks next to her. Dolly can feel his hand shaking still even though he is holding onto her.

As they get into the kitchen she finally walks away from his arm as he picks up Tina to the table and opens her ice cream bag. He sits next to her and pulls out a chair for Dolly next to him. Dolly sees that his face looks terrified.

"Can you tell me what this is about now? Or do you want to wait another 10-15 minutes?" she says as she uses her eyes to indicate the time and Tina, it's about nap time. She hopes he gets the message she isn't saying out loud.

"Let's eat." He mumbles.

Tina takes everyone's mind off of whatever the urgency is by her constant talking about what they saw on their walk today. With the winter thaw over, they were lucky enough to see a few animals roaming around the park today. She also told him the color of all the shoes she saw. At least this brought a smile to his face.

Dolly's heart was breaking though seeing how hard it was for him to even smile with his princess. "Tina, remember I told you I had a surprise for you today?" Dolly asks.

"Yes." She says.

"Today I am going to let you take your nap in a fort. Does that sound like fun?" Dolly asks hoping she knows what a fort is.

"Is fun?" Tina asks.

"Come with me, you can help me make it." She puts her hand out and Tina jumps off her chair. Dolly takes her into the living room and Tina helps her stack the big pillows on the floor, they cover them by tucking in her play blanket around the pillows. Then they go in the study and take her Daddy's blanket off the corner table and create a fort from her doll house to the couch, she puts the camel inside for protection and before Dolly can count to five, Tina is already making herself comfortable and falling asleep inside this new fort. It amazes Dolly that she still naps, but she has so much energy she burns all morning, the sleep is welcomed and because of her activities in the afternoons, bedtime is pretty easy as well.

She stands and sees that Victor is watching with tears in his eyes. She walks to him and he hugs her and won't let go. She reaches around him and hugs him back. Clearly, he needs this right now. She whispers, "Is your family ok? Did something happen to your mom?" she asks.

Victor pulls her into the study, "Don't sit." He says in disgust.

Now Dolly is confused completely.

"I spoke to my mom today, yes. That is the reason I came home. Did you or did you not say you are a trained decorator?" he asks in a serious voice.

"Yes, I am. I never hid that from you. I told you I was going to try and start up my own business when Tina started school." She says somewhat defensively.

"Ok, good." He starts to pace, faster and faster. All of a sudden he picks up something from his desk and tosses it across the room.

"Maybe I should leave." Dolly says, not wanting to be the aim of his anger.

"Oh god no, don't do that. I couldn't bear that. Not today." He sits down in his chair then stands up quickly.

"Then maybe you should start explaining because honestly Victor you're kind of scaring me right now." She says.

He walks over to Dolly one more time and pulls her into his arms, this feels so good to him, her body, her warmth, her smell, it is having a calming effect on him. He takes a deep breath of her scent and releases her. He holds her hand and brings her over to his window seat and indicates to her she should sit.

"I'm only going to say this once. Please listen." He says in a low voice.

"I'm all ears, closed mouth." She says as she pretends to zip her mouth closed.

"My mom is coming to visit, this coming Sunday, that is neither here nor there but I need you to take the house of boxes and make it into a house of warmth or she will move in and do it herself and we CANT have that happen." He pauses

She shakes her head yes.

"I came home early to talk to you about what you would charge to do this for me under such crazy time restraint. When I came home, I didn't see you or Tina. I walked around down here but then I heard voices up in Tina's room. I went up and opened the door." He pauses again and swallows hard.

Dolly feels his hand squeezing hers now. His eyes are down, he can't look at her. No knowing what else to do, she pulls his hand up to her mouth and kisses them as they are still holding tight to her hands. He finally looks at her, "Ana and Rubin were going at it like animals, they didn't even hear me scream until the third time." He puts his head down out of embarrassment.

"How could I not have seen this? All those times I saw a ring of what I thought was wet I assumed came from Tina and slow potty training. Then I realized I had seen the same thing on the couch over there which is why I said not to sit down. I blamed my daughter for their, their." His voice cut off.

Dolly, not knowing again what else to do, pulls him in to hold him. This poor man is blaming himself for their indiscretion. "That explains a lot." She says not realizing it was out loud.

"It does?" he lifts his head and looks at her.

"When I first came, they had a gate on her room. Tina spent hours in her room gated in until I brought down toys for her to play with downstairs, she had never played down there. She told me sometimes she got to sleep here on your couch as a treat. I thought it came from you. Also, when I started to take Tina out each day, they started to treat me better. Where are they now?" she asks in a soft voice.

"I almost strangled them, physically, the only thing that kept me from doing it is the fact that I can't help Tina from behind bars. I screamed in a voice from the depth of my gut, it was a voice I didn't know existed in me. I told them they had five minutes to dress, and leave and hand over their key. I would put their stuff out on the curb by 6:00pm and they can come collect it then. After they left I called you. Then I paced the house like a wild man. Then I called my lawyer and he found them within minutes because he knew where they lived when they went away for weekends. He showed up with the cops, I haven't heard back yet.

Dolly, what if Tina saw? What if they did something....." his voice cracked at the thought of his baby being damaged by the people he thought he could trust.

"My wife had wanted them. She conned me into getting married, into hiring these people specifically, tricked me into having a baby but unfortunately her lies caught up with her." he says almost mumbling.

"How?" Dolly asks.

"She was stricken with a terminal illness when Tina was only eight months old. It took her fast, she admitted to me all her tricks because she said heaven only accepts honest people like me and she needed to clear herself of her past sins. I let her talk, then I walked out of the room, I told the nurses I would not be back. I called my mom and told her what she had admitted to me. My mom was going to come live with me and take care of the baby but I told her that is what I worked my ass off for, to pay for the staff to make sure she is always under the best of care.

I've had intermittent nannies before, each one left claiming to not get along with the staff, but I assumed they were lying. Maybe they thought I wasn't paying enough. One told me if I doubled her salary she would never stay. I gave the lawyer their names and numbers today, maybe now they will talk. Oh god, Dolly, what am I going to do? What have I done with my life?" he voice cracks with emotion.

"In my family, we pick up ourselves and move on. Not always a good tactic but right now you have to. You can mourn your losses later but right now you have a house to take care of and a princess that thinks the world of you. I am your nanny, it's true, but I also consider you a friend and friends don't let friends drown in self-pity. So I'm throwing you a life preserver for now, one room at a time, why don't you move all the dining room boxes out of the dining room and line them up in the foyer, then you can take all the boxes out of the living room and place them down the hall, don't block the bathroom though. When you're done with that you can work on the overcrowded bedrooms upstairs. Finally, here is a number for you to call to get all new mattresses. I'll go make us all something fun for dinner. Tina will be up soon and she will help me in the kitchen. She only sleeps a half an hour or so in the afternoon now." Dolly gets up and starts for the door out of the study.

"Let's go!" she calls to him and when he looks up at her, "those boxes aren't moving themselves." She makes sure to smile from deep inside and finds it not too hard because he smiles back.

"I'll take your life preserver for now. The hard physical work will do me good. We'll need new couches too because who knows what or where they did things while I wasn't home." Victor shudders at the thought. He fights back the tears coming to him at the thought of his daughter witnessing any of it or worse, the fact that she was always caged into a room so she wouldn't bother them. Victor shakes his head and starts pulling on the boxes in the dining room, the physical strain will hopefully help him forget what he saw earlier. But for now it's burning in his eyes and his brain.

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Tina wakes up and walks into the kitchen, "Hello." She says to Dolly.

"Want to help me make dinner? Daddy is working hard right now and needs our help." She says with a smile.

Tina jumps into Dolly's arms and she is instantly put on the counter near the bowl Dolly is stirring. "Here, you're turn, but you have to do it slowly."

Dolly and Tina work together seamlessly as if they have done this a hundred times before. Dolly loves to cook, she calls it nasal therapy because good smells always put her in a better mood. The two spend the next half an hour playing with food, giggling and sometimes even screaming with fun.

Victor shuffles into the kitchen eventually, sweaty and exhausted from moving what feels like a hundred boxes of belongings he didn't even know he had.

"I'm glad you've been having fun here." His voice half in sarcasm and half in anger.

"Daddy!!!!!!" Tina yells and runs over to him with arms in the air. Victor leans down to pick her up and hold her. "You wet Daddy. Towel?" she asks.

"I'm going to shower then ok? Why don't you help Dolly finish up here, I'll be back in ten minutes." He puts Tina down and she runs over to finish helping Dolly.

Dolly smiles at Victor, she is proud of how he is handling this most unfortunate situation. Right now he looks like a cross between angry and exhausted, she is hoping that her chicken salad and fresh broccoli slaw will cheer him up.

Dolly looks for some pretty plates to put things on. She looks through all the cabinets and finally finds a few dishes that could be considered dinner plates instead of breakfast plates. Tina helps bring the napkins and silverware to the table, she walks into the den and brings back a pillow.

"What's that for?" Dolly asks.

"Daddy tired." She says.

Dolly watches as she puts the pillow on her Daddy's chair with unconditional toddler love. Dolly fights a tear from coming out by quickly turning around to the counter and plating her dinner instead of serving it family style.

"While we wait, let's go clean up the dining room a bit. Ok?" Dolly asks Tina.

Tina grabs a towel out of the drawer and walks into the dining room to start wiping down the chairs. "What are you doing?" Dolly asks.

"Ana say wiping good." She smiles.

Dolly learns another thing she wished she never knew. Not only did they take advantage of Victor, they used Tina as a slave wherever they could. Her heart hurts, she quickly jumps in. "Tina, you don't have to do that. I'm going to show you something fun for you because you're not a big kid yet. Is that ok?" she asks.

"What I do?" Tina asks.

Dolly thinks for a moment. She wants her to feel as if she is helping. "Ooooo, I know!! Let's go get your table so you can have a place to clean while I clean the big one. Ready? Let's run!" the two of them run upstairs to take Tina's table downstairs.

"Here Tina you take down your dishes in this bag here and I'll carry the table and chairs." Dolly says to her. Tina is very excited to help.

Once downstairs, Dolly notices there is a nook in the dining room that is not occupied by the formal dining room furniture already in there. It's a dead spot in the room and this table will be perfect there. She sets it down and Tina follows her to that corner of the room.

"Ok Tina, now you can take your table and wipe it down while I will be doing it on the big table. Don't forget to push in the chairs when you're done." She smiles at Tina who is waiting excitedly to get started.

"Ahem" Victor interrupts them.

"Hi Daddy, I'm wiping table." Tina says proudly.

"Doesn't that belong in your room Tina?" he asks as he looks at Dolly challengingly.

"Actually, most children don't like to sit on formal chairs anyway. So for those times when you will be serving at the dining room table on china, she will be able to eat on paper at her table. She can even set the table herself. Right Tina?" Dolly asks.

He is trying to take his eyes off of Dolly and back to his daughter.

"I like here Daddy." She says. "I'm hungry now." She puts her towel down on the table and the bag of dishes on the floor next to it.

"Excuse me, do big girls leave towels all over the house?" Dolly asks.

Tina looks back at the towel. "Dirty?" she asks.

"Yes, come let's eat." Dolly says smiling as she sees Tina pick up the towel and carry it to the kitchen.

The rest of Tina's evening goes without incident. They all eat together, clean up together and even Victor joins them for a game of playing with the doll house in the living room. Victor hadn't even noticed that it had been brought down as well. He realizes now that he spends way too much time in the study and not enough with his daughter.

"Whoa!!! Does anyone know what time it is?" he asks.

"Bed time!!!" Tina screams. She knows if Victor is home for bed it means he is also home for bath time and bedtime story time.

"Actually, I think it's clean up time." Dolly says.

Victor watches as Dolly and Tina put each house piece back to its original place and all the accessories had a place to call home too.

He lifts her onto his shoulders when she is done. "To bed!!!" He calls. Dolly watches as father and daughter walk happily upstairs.

She walks back into the dining room with another cleaning cloth. Dolly spends the time to thoroughly wipe off each piece of furniture. She can't put anything in the breakfront unless it has clean shelving. The built in corner shelving needs more scrubbing that her towel will allow, she

walks back into the kitchen and looks for a scrubbing sponge. Until the empty room is spotless, she will not open a box.

The first box reveals some really high quality china, each dish needs to be wiped off from the packing dust, so; she carries the plates one at a time back and forth to make sure each one is in the perfect place. On the bottom of the first box she finds a table runner that's coloring clashes with the room so she puts it in a separate pile to be put away later. Under that she finds a few tablecloths and napkin sets. Dolly puts this in the server on the other side of the room.

Her mind is in the zone now and she gets herself into a rhythm and continues to work one box at a time. As she empties one box, she breaks it down and stacks it in the corner of the foyer. She keeps at it without any acknowledgment of time.

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Victor had a great time putting Tina to bed. While he is upstairs he realizes that her room is very cluttered as Dolly said it was. Without the table and without the doll house, every wall is still covered with items. He realizes now that when he enlisted the help of Ana and Rubin to help put the house together they did nothing with it. No thought at all, if the box was marked with Tina's name they shoved it in her room. His mom will never like this.

Victor leaves his princes sleep and walks into the other two bedrooms upstairs. Both of them are stuffed with boxes. Some of them are marked for the basement and some are marked for other rooms as well. He had placed all his faith in people who had no desire to work. He paid them, housed them and they pay him back by spitting in his face.

Victor sits down on one of the guest room beds and allows himself to feel all the anger, all the sorrow, the self-pity and even the self-loathing that he feels right now. How could he let his world fall apart around him so quickly and so intensely? He falls back with his arm bent over his face. There he stays.

Dolly continues to work on the dining room. She has found some beautiful knickknacks which she puts on the built-in shelves in the corner. She even finds a couple of not so pretty place mats which she puts on Tina's table. On a child's table, no one will see its true look.

Keeping in her zone, Dolly continues to work. One box, two boxes, she is finally on the last box. Right now she stands up and looks around this beautiful banquet sized dining room that she has taken from an empty palette to a full technicolor dream entertaining dining room. Dolly shakes her head, she is hoping that Victor will allow her to come back and take pictures with her special lens.

Too bad she could not take one of the room empty. Maybe she will use her phone for the next room.

In this last box she finds more of the same. Extra tablecloths for when the leaves are in the table, the padding for those leaves as well. One by one she puts each piece away as she has done all night. The feeling of fulfillment and pride overtake her. "Yes, Dolly, this is what you are meant to do." She says out loud to herself.

With the last box folded up, all the packing materials either thrown out or stored in the basement on the shelving unit next to the steps for easy access.

"Ok, next." Dolly calls out like a nurse would in a doctor's office as she walks towards the living room. Before she opens the first box, she needs to rearrange the room and the pieces that are currently in it. This room is more of an all-purpose room, it's not a formal living room but it's also not really a den either.

Once the large furniture pieces have been scrubbed down, she now walks over to the chair that Tina calls Daddy's chair. Dolly pulls off the cushion to make sure there is nothing hiding in it. She declares it all clear and moves it to the best spot in the room.

Next, she needs to take off all the cushions from the couch. When she pulls off the second cushion, Dolly screams upon seeing a used male contraceptive piece laying there limp.

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Victor jumps up from the bed, he did not realize that he had fallen asleep, but someone screamed, he jumps off the bed and runs over to Tina's room, pushes the door open quickly, only to see his little princess sound asleep. He bends over and kisses her while backing out of the room.

Victor checks his phone for the time, its 1:00am. He must have been dreaming he heard a scream. But then he hears, "Damn!! Ewww!!! Crap!" coming from downstairs.

Taking two steps at a time, he runs downstairs, the first thing he sees across from the steps and on the other side of the foyer is a completed dining room. He is in awe for a moment until he hears. "Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god!" in a woman's voice, sounding panicked.

He quickly turns around and sees Dolly jumping around the living room. He runs to her and pulls her into his arms. "It's ok, breathe. It's ok. Whatever it is, we will do this together. Come on, Dolly it can't be that bad." He whispers in her ear.

Dolly cannot stop shaking, her head is going back and forth saying no into his shoulder. Dolly reaches down inside of herself and pulls herself partly away from him, enough that she is facing the couch, with one arm still around Victor, she picks up her hand and points to the remnants of a tryst interrupted.

Victor follows her arm with his eyes all the way down to her finger and his eyes make the jump to the couch. His whole body freezes, he knows what he is seeing and he now understands why this woman in his arms is shaking so much. He has to be the protector now, he pulls her back into him and holds on tight.

Dolly allows herself to be pulled in and finds the smell of him and his warmth are exactly what she needs right now. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I should have known, I was here."

Immediately, Victor pushes Dolly out at arm's length. "Look at me Dolly." He pulls her chin up with his finger so her eyes are staring at his. "Look at me dear. We both fell short on that mark. I never should have kept them. What do I need them for, I'm one person. Let's throw the cushion back on and pull this sucker right outside all the way to the street, it may not even be there in the morning. My mom always hated this couch anyway." Victor's voice is sincere, Dolly can feel it. "Hold on, speaking of mom, she gave me these gliders for moving furniture, let me go get them and we'll put them under the legs and it will slide to the door. I'm going to put the ramp over the steps as well so we can get it down easily. I'll be right back." Victor walks down the hall to find the gliders, he finds himself smiling. He feels he is past the anger and is now finding the whole scenario kind of funny. If this were a movie people would surely be laughing at this scene, he thinks to himself.

Dolly is mortified still. She can't bring herself to move. Right under her so-called watchful eye. She puts her hand on her stomach. What kind of parent will I be that I can't see what is right in front of me? She thinks to herself. What do I know about parenting anyway? We always had babysitters taking care of us, not a nanny, nannies give love and direction, babysitters only make sure you don't die under their watch. Victor wants her to help him move this couch, she knows this is not a good idea, the doctor told her to be careful with her job that she should not be moving anything too heavy.

Her nerves are boiling over right now, Dolly tries to get her feet to move. Slowly, she makes her way to the kitchen to find some disposable gloves to put on, she puts on three layers on each hand

and walks back to the couch. With a garbage bag in one hand, she pushes the item of her disgust into the bag. The idea, as well as a bad smell coming from the couch is creating a bad reaction inside of her. She is trying to hold on to her dinner right now. She is losing the fight, Dolly begins to run towards the bathroom with one goal in mind.

Victor heads back to the den with the gliders in his hand, he is in a much better mood right now. Not sure if it was the sleep he had, or holding onto Dolly or possibly the combination of it all. Seeing Dolly so scared, really pulled at his heart in a way he did not know it could. As he is about to enter the den, Dolly rushes by, he watches as she darts right into the bathroom. Her face did not look good. He looks back at the couch, sees a garbage bag on the floor. Victor bends down to pick it up, as he does he smells something coming from the couch. He moves the other two cushions off of the couch to reveal more of the same item, anger boils back inside of him. They must have been laughing at him every time he sat down on the couch, every time he and Tina curled up on here to watch a movie, then he notices where the smell is coming from, there are not one but three dead mice. Victor crouches down onto the floor and begins to cry. Why did he not smell this before? Is the cushion so thick and the leather so insulating that it covered it up or has he been blind to his surroundings because all he saw was Tina?

Victor stays there for a few moments and then he picks himself up as his father would have wanted him to do and he walks into the kitchen, he sees the box of disposable gloves already out, he puts on a couple of layers and walks back to the couch to finish what it looks like Dolly started. Victor throws away the bag all the way outside then returns and puts the couch back together, he slides a glider under each leg and easily pushes it towards the front door. "Hey mom, these are great." He says out loud as he finds himself able to move the couch alone, Dolly has not returned from the bathroom yet. He needs a little help getting the couch onto the ramp but manages it himself. Once it is there he is able to push it all the way to the curb, he knows that once there people assume it's free and someone will probably take it. Victor takes the glides out from under the couch and heads back towards the house. He passes Dolly's car but then takes a step back, he sees her crying in the front seat. She is in no condition to drive home, he looks at his watch, its now 2:00am.

Victor knocks on the window and startles Dolly, she turns to lock the door but not before he pulls it open. "You're not driving home like this." He puts his arm out for her to take and climb out. Dolly doesn't move, Victor leans over and takes the keys out of her hand as insurance. "If you need a moment you can sit here, I'll be on the porch waiting." He says softly.

Dolly inhales the smell of him before he walks away. "This is not good Dolly, you can't be falling for him." She says softly to herself. "This is getting way too complicated. No one is going to want me, a broken, unemployed, pregnant no good decorator. Look at him sitting there watching me, his face so sad, his body...ahhhh that body. Stop it!!! Dolly!" She yells at herself and slams both of her hands into the steering wheel. "Ahhhhh!"

There is another knock at the window, the door opens. "Dolly, come inside, nothing is going to get

solved out here tonight. It's after 2:00 in the morning." He puts out his hand, this time she takes it and stands up. The two of them walk into the house hand in hand, Dolly leaning her head onto his arm, by the time they get up the porch, his arm is around her shoulders and her tears are still flowing, they walk into the den where he slowly sits down into his favorite chair and pulls her onto his lap. Without words the two of them fall asleep together.

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"Daddy!!!" Tina calls from the bathroom.

Victor wakes in a fog, that's the second time tonight he has woken with a scream, only as he opens his eyes he sees it's not night anymore. His fog clears and he sees Dolly sleeping on him, curled up on his lap. With the precision of a surgeon, he squeezes himself out from under her without waking her and heads upstairs to Tina.

The morning routine must remain the same, regardless of how tired he is. Bringing her down the stairs Victor sees the dining room again, this time in full sunlight. It's more beautiful than he originally thought. "Daddy, look table has blankies!" Tina points to her little table with the placemats on it.

Victor squats down near his daughter, "Yes, Didn't Dolly make it pretty? She made the whole room pretty too." Victor picks her up and walks around the room to show her everything.

"Oooo, my pretty horse next to your pretty things too." Tina exclaims "Everything pretty here."

"Yes it is" He carries her over to the den to check on Dolly. 'Everything is so pretty in here too' he thinks to himself, then he shakes his head. Where did that come from? "Come, let's make breakfast, Daddy is going to stay home with you today, how does that sound?" he asks Tina.

Tina wiggles out of his arms and runs to find the paper plates so she can set the table while Victor makes some eggs for everyone.

The smell of freshly made hot chocolate and eggs seeps into Dolly's nose. Smells always make or break her mood and this one is waking all her senses. Dolly blinks her eyes open slowly, she is not sure who is cooking in her apartment and she immediately becomes scared and turns slowly

towards her kitchen area she opens only one eye to see if she can see what is going on. Then, she sits up quickly because she does not see a kitchen but a bookshelf. Dolly's head whips around and her eyes are now fully open, she realizes she is in Victor's chair. Her evening all rushes back to the forefront of her mind.

"Dolly!!" Tina screams right in front of her. Dolly jumps.

"Come, Daddy do breakfast! I'm hungry." Tina tells her.

Dolly follows Tina into the kitchen. She goes to the sink first and rinses out her mouth and washes her face. Good thing there are no mirrors in the kitchen.

"Hot chocolate?" Victor asks as he hands her a mug.

She nods and accepts the cup, with two hands around the cup she brings it to her lips. The homemade style hot chocolate reaches her stomach with ease and soothes her nerves a bit. "I'm sorry about last night." She finally brings herself to say as she sits down at the table.

"I'm not." Victor response as he eats his eggs.

"Daddy, we go park?" Tina asks.

"We will go to the park after lunch like you always do with Dolly. This morning we are going to clean the house, then we are going to shop for new furniture. What color couch should we get for the den?" Victor asks Tina.

"Me purple. Dolly Red." Tina smiles

Victor looks at Dolly, hoping she understands he plans on staying home today to help her. "Tell Dolly if you like the dining room." Victor says to Tina.

"My table pretty." She says with enthusiasm

"Thank you Tina. I'm glad you like it. Purple is a good color for a couch but you'll have to look hard to find one." Dolly says.

"We'll have to look hard then." Victor says, emphasizing the word we.

Dolly looks up from her plate at Victor. Victor swallows his last bite of egg and sits back in his chair to face her fully. "When I first came downstairs last night, the dining room caught my eye and blew me away. Now that I see it in the sunlight, I'm even more impressed. Dolly you took a landfill and made it in to a blooming garden. It is exactly what I'm looking for. I realized last night as I was sitting on the porch that I asked you to do a herculean feat by yourself in less than a week. I emailed my partner last night to tell him that I won't be in this week until I settle some things at home." Victor watches her face and what he sees worries him, she seems scared. He feels the same way. "Please Dolly, you shouldn't be doing this alone. I'll pay your designing fee, whatever it takes. Please." He pleads with her.

"I need to assess the whole house in the daylight. Sit down and make some drawings, do this right, professionally. I would like to take before and after pictures for a portfolio as well if you don't mind." She says in her best professional voice, although she feels her emotions are getting in the way as well. This will be the longest week she will ever have.

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The first couple of days are so busy that Dolly doesn't even realize they have passed. She is now down to 48 hours before Victor's mom shows up. The main floor is finished all except for the purple couch being delivered the day before his mother arrives, it had better be perfect. It turns out that Victor has great taste and it makes it easy to shop with him and for him. The kitchen has been revamped as well, today Dolly will finish painting the final door trims.

Tina's room looks like a princess belongs there and that is exactly what she likes. Dolly added posts to the bed to make it look like a canopy bed without the canopy, then added crown molding and light fixtures you would see in a more formal room. Dolly took out half of the toys, added in window treatments, added in some of Tina's favorite books and music for her to play with. Apparently, Tina moves much faster in the morning if she hears music.

At this point, the only room that Dolly has not visited upstairs is Victor's, which will most likely happen this afternoon, Dolly has been trying to avoid it the whole week. Especially since he keeps asking about what color she thinks is good for a relaxing bedroom. This morning, after she finishes

with the kitchen cabinet doors she will be heading to the basement. Victor and Dolly decided that they will call in a contractor to have him finish the basement to look like a large living room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. This is where his help used to sleep and Victor will now have his mom sleep or any of his guests so no one feels they are invading his privacy by staying upstairs, especially if they stay a long time.

Dolly remembered a guy she worked with on one of her early projects at the institute and called him after hours last night to ask him for an emergency job. He met her at Victor's house and fell in love with the emptiness of the basement, giving him ease and flexibility. He is not sure he and his guys can finish the whole thing in such a short time but they can easily have one bedroom re-done and the bathroom. Mostly it needs a good paint job and a little fixing of the doorframe and closet shelves. Dolly had Victor sign off on that and they will continue the rest while his mom is here.

Dolly has not had a lot of time to spend in her rented room except to sleep in it and grab a change of clothing. She sometimes doesn't even pay attention to what she is wearing because she knows she is only going to get dirty anyway. Dolly walks through the main floor this morning to verify everything is as in place as she thinks it is.

"Dolly!!" screams Tina.

Dolly turns to see Tina running right at her, she bends down to scoop the child up in her arms. It always feels good to hold her. 'Stop that Dolly, this is only temporary.' She thinks to herself. But the warmth of Tina and the swelling in her heart every time she holds this little girl grows bigger and bigger as does her own stomach. "Dolly is going to finish painting in the kitchen this morning, what are you and Daddy going to do?" she asks.

"Grandma gets bed and messer right?" Tina says with enthusiasm.

"I'll get that delivery on rush but the rest can come whenever they finish downstairs. We said we wanted to make it like a den right? Comfy couches, maybe one or two recliners and some kid friendly things as well." Victor says for clarification.

"Yeah, that sounds good, you guys go, I'll finish up in the kitchen before lunch and move on to whichever room has not been finished." Dolly musters out.

"Yay furture. We get red?" Tina asks.

"Only if we find a good one." Victor answers. "Come my princess, let's begin on our adventure for the day. We will slay the furniture stores and bring home the big dragons or at least big pillows." He smiles.

'oh that smile is going to be the end of me' Dolly thinks to herself. 'how am I going to make it until the Fall if he keeps looking at me like that? I'm sure it's not for me, get a grip Dolly.' She thinks to herself.

"Um Dolly!" Victor calls

Dolly shakes her head, "Yeah?"

"Where did you go just now? I called your name three times? Never mind, we're on our way out. Don't make lunch I'm going to pick it up before we come back. If you need anything send me text." Victor says, still smiling. 'Stop the damn smiling old man, she is here as a temporary nanny, she has spent almost a week with you for 12 hours a day does not mean her smiles are for you, but those eyes are killing me.' Victor shakes his head and grabs Tina's jacket. "Put this on first my dear princess, it's a bit chilly this morning." Tina jumps into the jacket, "Bye Dolly!" she calls.

Dolly finally finds her breath and moves from her spot. "Work Dolly, take your mind off of things." Dolly quickly gets to work in the kitchen.

"Hello!!!" calls a woman's voice.

Dolly jumps from where she is and runs to the front foyer with the brush in her hand, with the first drip she runs back to put it down and quickly heads back to the foyer. "Hello, can I help you?" she asks. As soon as the woman turns around she knows it's Victor's mother. "You must be Victor's mother. Aren't you early?" she asks.

"No, I'm on time dear, as usual my son read the itinerary wrong. It said I was coming in on flight 22 not on the 22nd. Then I reminded him I was coming before the weekend, he probably heard only weekend." She smiles. "And who are you?" she asks.

"That's a funny question, I'm the temporary nanny for Tina but this past week I've been the decorator which is my actual training." Dolly says with pride.

"Morning Dollface." A voice from behind Victor's mom comes.

"And this is Max, he is the contractor that is getting the basement room ready for you in two days. This is Victor's mom Max." Dolly says.

"Morning maam, as long as you are here, would you like to approve the paint we've picked out for your room?" Max asks with a smile. Shortly after saying it, a crew of eight men walk in and he directs them where the basement is.

"Max, why so many people?" Dolly asks.

"I won a bid for a big job, it starts tomorrow I told the men anyone who comes today is assured to being part of that job which will keep us busy until the winter holidays and everyone will be making good money from it. So, this morning eight guys showed up to come here in the van and there are more coming. We may be able to finish the whole thing today. This way Mom." He says to Victor's mom.

She follows instantly, "Victor is making me my own room? This is so exciting!! I'll be able to visit more often. Oooooo look at this basement is so big, I could make it into my own apartment." Dolly hears Victor's mom exclaim from the basement.

Dolly smiles to herself, if she likes the empty basement, wait until she actually looks at the rest of the house. Ohhh, Victor doesn't know ! she screams into her own mind. She quickly sends him a text "Your mom showed up, her flight was #22 not arriving on 22nd. No worries, Max is here and told her you were making the basement for her and she went down with him eager to pick out everything she wants. Do you care?" Clicks send.

Dolly finishes the two cabinets she had left and decides to go check on Max. "So, how are things going here?" she asks.

Max rolls his eyes but Victor's mom says, "Well, we picked out the color for my room but Max here says you want to paint this large room blue, why on earth would you want that?" she asks.

“Easy, your granddaughter says blue makes her happy, her room is blue too. Plus, she and Victor are out right now buying furniture for this room and the 2nd bedroom over there. She wants a red couch, so blue will work. What color did you want in your room?” she asks.

“I wanted to use a dark color for one wall but Max says he doesn’t like to paint dark. What’s wrong with brown?” she asks.

“Wow, that would be so nice with blue. Max use the brown on one wall in her room and one wall out here – it will all pull together that way and a red couch will be on the opposite side of the brown. How about we leave the men here to do what they have to do and I’ll show you what I’ve done with the rest of the house.” Dolly says. Max smiles at her from behind Victor’s mom.

“Sure, let’s go.” Mom says.

“So far I’ve finished the main floor, Tina’s room and the extra rooms upstairs. The only place I haven’t touched is Victor’s room and the 2nd bathroom upstairs.” Dolly says as she walks with mom up the stairs.

“I love to start at the top and work my way down. Let’s go to the extra rooms first. This is so much fun. It’s the first time I’ve seen this house. You know that Tina picked out this house?” she says.

“Excuse me?” Dolly says.

“After his first wife was out of the picture, Victor did not want to stay in the house of bad memories. They were driving along the road and Tina spotted the sign being put up at this house. She made him stop, the realtor took him in and he made an offer on the spot. Then he hired her to sell his house. That’s my Victor, makes a decision and follows through with force.” She laughs as she walks into the first room.

Dolly waits in the hallway and watches as Victor’s mom runs from one room to the next and then back again. When she finally comes to a stop in the hallway she exclaims, “Oh darling!!! You’ve done a wonderful job, this is a house that any decorator would be proud of. Did you take before and after pictures? Oh sure you did, every good decorator does. You didn’t do my baby’s room yet so let’s look at that later. Come show me downstairs.” She starts down the stairs in front of Dolly.

Dolly follows with a smile. "Even though the study was done before I got here, I had to rearrange it to make more sense. I hope you like it." She says.

"Like it!! Honey I love it. You have a real eye for making a room flow in a natural way. Oh my!!!" she pauses with her mouth open.

Dolly follows her eyes, she is looking out of the study and straight across the foyer into the dining room. "Not to be snobby but I happen to really like how the dining room came out. Shall we?" Dolly says and hands Victor's mom her elbow. She slides one arm inside Dolly's bent elbow and leans into her as they cross the foyer.

"Dolly, you outdid yourself, this furniture never looked so complete in my house." She looks around the room slowly taking in each part of it. A tear begins to fall down her cheek as she looks over at the small table set up with her mom's placemats.

She bends down in front of the small table. "It's for Tina. She likes to set her own table; that is why she has access to all the paper goods. I found those placemats in the bottom of one of the breakfront drawers." Dolly explains.

Victor's mom turns to stand up with one of the placemats in her hand. "They are so ugly, but they were my mom's. Did Victor tell you?" she asks.

Dolly shakes her head no.

Dolly's phone buzzes. "I'm a big idiot!!!! I can't believe I did it again. Thank you for everything you've done on the fly. Without you her showing up early would have been even more disastrous. You're the best Dolly, what would I do without you? Picking up lunch next, what do you want?"

"Victor is picking up lunch, do you want anything in particular?" Dolly asks.

"Please, call me Mom, you're going to be part of the family soon anyway. Ask him to pick up some fresh sandwiches. He knows the kind." She smiles and leads Dolly into the living room to sit down.

"Your mom wants sandwiches." Send

“and you?” he asks

“craving a milkshake, I’ll make it here, no need to buy me anything.” Send

“we’ll talk about that when I get home□” Victor says.

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The rest of the afternoon was full of fun. Turns out Victor’s mom loves to play with Tina and it works both ways. So while they were playing downstairs, Victor and Dolly rearranged his bedroom and decided on all the finishing touches that need to be added. Instead of wasting time shopping in stores, they went on the internet and found all they needed. The house will be complete by the end of next week.

This is the hardest she has ever worked on a job but it also has been the most satisfying. Dolly can’t decide if it’s because she pulled it off so quickly or if it’s because it’s Victor’s house. Walking around the kitchen now making dinner Dolly finds thoughts lost on spending more time with Victor in his bedroom. She shakes her head, ‘get these thoughts out of your mind’ Dolly says to herself.

‘Remember this is a temporary thing and it’s a job, you have an apartment to go home to, this is NOT your home.’ She reminds herself. Dolly stops at the counter to get control of the tears she feels are about to fall. She braces herself on the counter with stiff arms and her head hanging down. Something warm is wrapping itself around her waist, Dolly looks down and sees that it’s Victor’s arms.

“When are you due?” Victor asks.

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Each story will take you into another person's world. Take you through their emotional trials and triumphs. There are stories that are light in nature and others that may have hints of darkness. You will find happy endings, some not so happy, and some will leave it open for you to decide. The characters may show you a new way to love, or maybe show you how to find your inner strength.

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