

Monday

12:06 AM

Last Monday, you took a week of leave.

In accordance with company policy, Anne from HR calls to offer her condolences and a few more days, should you need it.

She says, I can't imagine.

How *unlucky*.

6:45 AM

You don't have to wake up because you never slept.

7:12 AM

You brush your teeth.

Unlucky.

You turn the word over and over in your head, feel it ringing in your ears, as you spit out a mouthful of Winter Blast Mint. *Unlucky* slithers between your teeth to wilt under your tongue, then climbs down your esophagus to curl around your ribs.

8:59 AM

Work is a big glass tower on the corner of 43rd, jutting forth to pierce the cloudy morning sky. To arrive at your cubicle, you must traverse through a series of pristine hallways, each one emptier than the next.

Every footstep you take hollows off the ceramic tile to linger in the frigid office air.

In many ways, it reminds you of a hospital.

9:42 AM

You forgot how much you hate spreadsheets.

10:21 AM

You're rechecking Stacy's invoices and the endless lines and numbers make you think *hospital bills* and, all of a sudden, your heart lurches and you're standing, once again, in the washroom down the hall from the NICU.

You think, I don't want to be here, but you've never really had that choice. Instead, you dry your hands and look in the mirror, at a starchy-sad-hopeful woman with deep ruts lining her blurry eyes and exhaustion twitching along her cheeks.

In this memory, you look up, and there is an awful, hideous mural unfurling itself across the fluorescent ceiling and—

The numbers on your screen blur into hazy Rorschach splotches of ink as you click *Enter*.

1:08 PM

You saw that mural over a hundred times; 118 times, to be exact.

And you can recall each detail with astonishing clarity. Tiger and Piglet and Cinderella, animated with happiness, dancing with lilies and fawns and fluttering baby birds. And right there, scrawled across Cinderella's left arm in tacky, gaudy red: *There Is No Footprint Too Small That It Cannot Leave an Imprint on This World*.

You think, I saw that mural over a hundred times; 118 to be exact, and I hated it more each time.

2:51 PM

Your Disney stapler, a souvenir from your honeymoon trip to Japan, breaks when you jam it too hard on Stacy's stack of invoices.

Unlucky.

3:21 PM

You have always been a fast worker, so it makes sense that you would finish early today.

But now this means that you have nothing to do with your brain and your hands and your everything.

Maybe you should ask to go home.

You think, I should go see my daughter.

4:03 PM

You finally muster the strength to get up and go ask Anne from HR if you could please leave early, because well, there's that tragic circumstance in the family, and you would like to see your husband and your daughter.

You know how husbands are, can't even make dinner without us.

Ha-ha.

It's very urgent.

Of course.

4:47 PM

You are waiting for the five o'clock bus. You are going to see your daughter.

5:07 PM

There's a father sitting in the seat across from you.

He has his boy next to him.

The father whispers something in his boy's ear, and the boy whispers back, then points at the blinking street lights outside and laughs. He laughs and laughs and laughs, until you can almost see peals of his exhilaration frothing in the air.

Would it be weird, if you just...went up to them? If you just grabbed him and screamed, take your boy to the park and across the world and hold him tight and—

The bus pulls to a stop. They're still laughing when they leave.

5:41 PM

It takes you forty minutes to arrive at the mausoleum on the outskirts of your city and because they close at six you have to really, really rush.

The ground is still wet from yesterday's rain. You leave zigzags spiraling in the dirt behind you.

You're thinking of that mural, stretching across the washroom ceiling down the hall from the NICU and all the hours you spent inside, praying and waiting and praying. You think of the boy and his father, laughing at the streetlights flashing by and your broken Disney stapler from your honeymoon in Japan and finally,

5:45 PM

you're here,

you're here,

you're here.

5:49 PM

You smell lavender shampoo, and baby oil, and milk.

Her heart beats against yours.

5:51 PM

Your daughter has the prettiest face.

And you could look at her forever, at her half-moon eyes and dimples and waving tufts of silky hair, and you love everything about her, from the way she bobbed to Franklin's old CDs and her twitching thumbs and rounded hiccups, and

5:53 PM

you look,
and you look,
and

7:09 PM

Franklin wants to know how your day was.
It got better, you tell him.
(You saw your daughter for nine minutes today.)

11:59 PM

You're thinking of the washroom again.
Lucky turns over and over in your head, ringing in your ears. You feel it curling around your ribs, and you think I am so [], because I am your mother and I always will be, and one day we'll spend all of eternity together and—
You're thinking of the unused diaper boxes stacked in the corner, of the baby oil and lavender shampoo bottles still sitting in the shower, of the tiny footprints trailing over every corner of your heart.
Of the mural, glossing over the ceiling, and you think,
I finally understand.