

The words *Wake Up* slip from the monitor on the nightstand that they bought to feel like responsible, old-enough parents. She reminds him to plug it in before her eyes slip each night and the last words of the request slow and drift and are traded for just a few extra moments of sleep. He remembers most nights.

He thinks he hears the words from it and he thinks he hears them again and then he's upright with the panic and fog of new fatherhood and not enough sleep and that couldn't have been, right?

Her?

He sees breathe solid in moonlight coming in stripes down into their little apartment. He offered to do the maintenance on the rest of the units in the building in exchange for cheap enough rent. The landlord agreed and he spent the winter reading books on plumbing and mourning the loss of his mother.

She passed in September.

He remembers seeing the point then of sitting in your Sunday finest and saying the words in unison and thinking of her as just some other place than here. He often thought about how things would be

different were she still alive and able to be reached on a Wednesday morning, on a morning that he had work in a few hours and class after that and pick up the baby and be a good father and husband and *don't worry, son, I'll be right over*, he thought. She could bring toilet paper and that light bulb he hasn't had the time to get and pick up a prescription and she could make them a meal and let them take a nap together in the afternoon. She would know what to do, he thought, but the disease had already won by the time her first grandchild was born, Josephine.

There was a photo of the two of them above the crib, their photographed expressions different only in age. They promised her they would tell Josephine every story, stories about a young Savage from Louisiana and how she met grandpa on that island in the middle of the ocean. They promised to give her the old photographs, handpicked, saying to us *make sure you show her this one, this is my favorite*, and to give her the two blankets she embroidered for her granddaughter, them sharing a name, Josephine in the corner of each and a note that read *may these keep you warm on cold nights*.

The words *Wake Up*, again.

Late last night they had been in the office of their doctor for the third time this week. They couldn't get her to stop crying, not for long at least, and they begged for answers. His freshly pressed white coat and the slow curve of his glasses always helped bring calm and softness and a break from arguing with each over just the right rhythm to use for bouncing her to sleep. The doctor's confidence in handling her and his ability to continue talking in stretched and pleasing tones, despite the constant screams, both frustrated and relieved them. He balanced her in one palm, curled her up and down, and said *Hey now there is no need for all that racket, is there?* He swung her side to side, held out like a newspaper in front of him, tried to find the right move. The new parent instinct to hold their breath and reach out to catch her should she fall was muted by months of not enough sleep and more than enough stress and they sat taking note of every detail.

He wrote *lift like a dumbbell, soft sustained humming*. She wrote *I'll never sleep again*.

They left again with a screaming child and nothing said with glazed forever stares and a few tips to try at home. The doctor said *stay calm and weather the storm, this'll pass soon enough*. I said *how soon is soon enough?* They hummed and ran the water while they tried to sleep with her on the bathroom floor. He calculates how much next month's bill will be. A lot. They burned through two hairdryers and they ran the vacuum cleaner so long that the bag burst and they thought the apartment was on fire.

She would know what to do, he thought.

He dreamt of a phone call to her, *mother can you please help us?*

*I'll be right over.*

The words *Wake Up* slip from the speaker again and he knows it's her voice this time, the same voice he remembers as a boy hearing from the other room, warning of what would happen were he not in the car in two minutes. The voice and the cold and the sounds coming from the baby's room had him at full attention then, but it was the things not there that made skin tighten and eyes focus. It was the empty black of the alarm clock display. It was

the cold that got inside hours after the snow and ice overwhelmed everything outside. It was their baby not making a sound and then the sounds of drawers opened and slammed closed, light flickering in the space between the carpet and door.

The cycle of those days made everything twist and his mind strain to idle and he questioned whether or not he'd lost it, often. He can't remember whether or not it was just his fried connections, blurred and shifted, the kettle whistling and the neighbor knocking lightly on the front door for butter, half hour midnight drives east to the factory for his shift through Kansas winter and cigarettes smoked in dollar store gloves with the windows cracked. Normal melted and the lines between here and not here didn't make sense.

He still smiles when thinking back on those years when love was all they thought they needed.

He now can't remember if everything was torn through or not, searched and tossed or not, door hinges warped by a frantic search for something important, the neat stacks of pants and diapers and blankets

and toys, thrown everywhere or not? He can't remember if he checked the window above the crib and he can't remember if it was locked. He can't remember if he ran to the front door and along the west wall windows, checking each before hurrying back to the crib to pick her up and keep her safe and warm.

He finds her asleep and quiet and wrapped neatly and tight in two blankets a grandmother embroidered for her granddaughter, them sharing a name, Josephine in the corner of each, and a note that read *may these keep you warm on cold nights.*