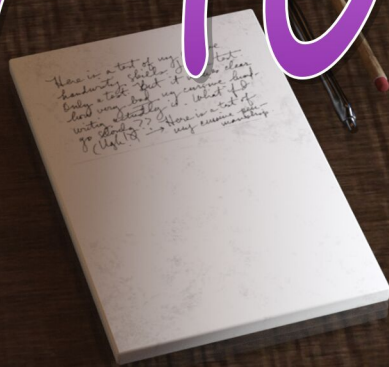
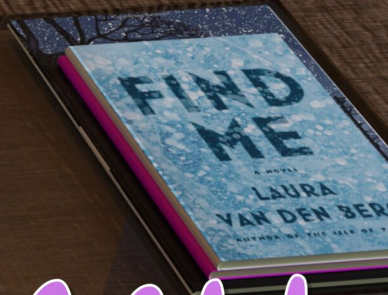
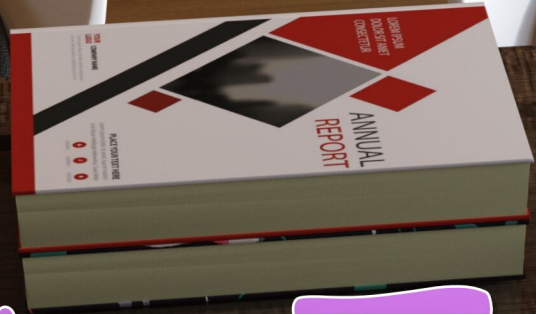
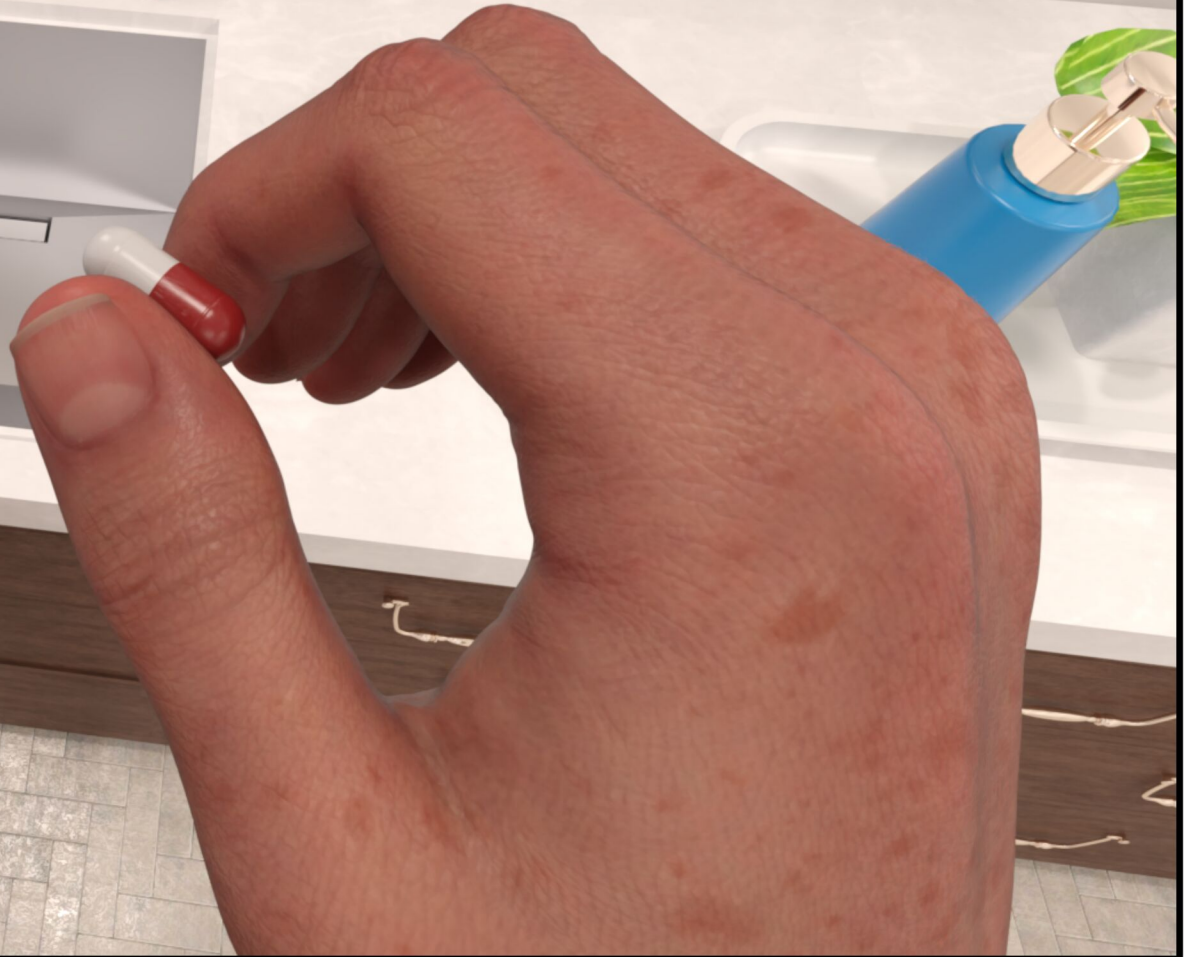


A Letter To Jeremy



I'VE AVOIDED WRITING THIS LETTER FOR YEARS BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW IF I HAVE THE RIGHT WORDS TO EXPRESS MYSELF. STILL, I WILL TRY TO SAY WHAT I NEED TO SAY, EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS DAUNTING AND LIKE I WILL SOUND FOOLISH. THE FIRST THING I MUST SAY IS THAT I AM FINALLY HAPPY. I AM TRULY HAPPY FOR WHAT MAY BE THE FIRST TIME IN MY ENTIRE LIFE. I DIDN'T KNOW IF THAT WOULD EVER BE POSSIBLE. FOR THE LONGEST TIME, I SUFFERED IN SILENCE. PEOPLE WERE ALWAYS 'THERE' FOR ME, BUT I COULDN'T AVAIL MYSELF OF THEIR SUPPORT. THEY WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND. HOW COULD THEY? NO ONE ELSE I KNEW WAS GOING THROUGH WHAT I WAS. NO ONE ELSE HAD GONE THROUGH WHAT I HAD.



I CAN TELL YOU NOW THAT IT GETS BETTER. I HOPE THAT PROVIDES SOME COMFORT. NOT THAT YOU ARE HERE ANYMORE TO BE ABLE TO SAVOR IT.

EACH DAY, LITTLE BY LITTLE, THINGS IMPROVED FOR ME. I COULD HARDLY BELIEVE IT. THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN SO MANY THINGS THAT FELT OUT OF REACH. TANTALIZINGLY CLOSE BUT ETERNALLY INCHES AWAY FROM MY GRASP. THE IMPROVEMENT I'VE EXPERIENCED HAS SHOWN ME THAT YOU WERE RIGHT ALL ALONG. RIGHT TO FEEL THE WAY YOU FELT. RIGHT TO WANT WHAT YOU WANTED.

IF I COULD, I WOULD LIKE TO TRAVEL BACK IN TIME TO SHOW YOU WHAT WOULD BE POSSIBLE.



YOU'D BE HAPPY TO HEAR THAT I'VE REMARRIED. HE'S A HANDSOME, GENEROUS, THOUGHTFUL MAN. I WAITED A RESPECTABLE AMOUNT OF TIME BEFORE I RESUMED DATING OUT OF RESPECT. IT WASN'T EASY, THOUGH. ONCE THINGS WERE IMPROVING, I WANTED TO GET OUT THERE AND LIVE!

WE MET ON A SUMMER AFTERNOON. IT HAD JUST RAINED, SO THE AIR SMELLED THAT PARTICULAR WAY IT DOES AFTER. I THOUGHT OF YOU. YOU ALWAYS LOVED THAT VERY THING. IT'S JUST AS BRIGHT FOR ME TODAY AS IT EVER WAS FOR YOU POSSIBLY MORE SO. I FEEL LIKE MY SENSE OF SMELL HAS BEEN REBORN, AND THE VIBRANCY OF THE WORLD IS ON CONTINUOUS DISPLAY FOR ME.



DATING WAS NEW AGAIN. YOUR FATHER'S PASSING WAS TRAUMATIC FOR US ALL. I KNOW IT NEARLY RUINED YOU. I WISH THINGS HAD BEEN DIFFERENT. KNOWING NOW, WE COULD HAVE GOTTEN HELP...

I CAN'T HARDLY BEAR THE THOUGHTS. I'M SORRY. I KNEW THIS WOULD BE DIFFICULT. I DIDN'T REALIZE IT WOULD BRING UP SO MANY FEELINGS FOR ME.

OKAY, BACK TO STEVEN. THAT'S HIS NAME, BY THE WAY. HE'S THE NICEST, MOST CARING MAN I'VE EVER HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF KNOWING. HE WOULD HAVE LOVED YOU. HE WOULD HAVE SUPPORTED YOU. HE WOULD HAVE BEEN THE KIND OF ROLE MODEL THAT A SON COULD BE PROUD TO HAVE IN THEIR LIFE.



WE DATED FOR TWO YEARS. BELIEVE ME WHEN I SAY THAT I WAS READY TO TIE THE KNOT WITHIN A MONTH. STILL, OUR COURTSHIP WAS VALUABLE IN HELPING ME CONFIRM THAT I HAD REALLY FOUND THE PEACE I NEEDED. MY HEART MIGHT HAVE RUN AWAY WITH ME IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR CALMER HEADS PREVAILING.

MAYBE I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT TAHITI IN ANOTHER LETTER. IT'S TOO LONG A STORY TO COVER HERE. WHAT I NEED TO SAY TO YOU STILL HAS TOO MANY WORDS LEFT TO SAY.

WE WERE MARRIED IN THE FALL—ON OCTOBER 19TH, IN HONOR OF YOU. EVERY YEAR I GET A HAPPY CONVERGENCE OF MEMORIES AS MY ANNIVERSARY APPROACHES.



BEING MARRIED AGAIN IS EXACTLY HOW YOU DESCRIBED IT. I NEVER SHOULD HAVE DOUBTED IT.

I CRY SOMETIMES WHEN THINKING ABOUT HOW YOUR LIFE COULD HAVE GONE. IT... DOESN'T SEEM FAIR. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I TRY TO LIVE THE BEST LIFE IN THAT SPIRIT EVERY DAY. EACH DAY I WAKE UP NEXT TO STEVEN, I'M REMINDED OF YOUR SACRIFICES, STRUGGLES, AND THE WAY YOU PERSEVERED AS BEST YOU KNEW HOW. I CAN'T FATHOM LIVING THAT LIFE. IT'S NOT THE LIFE I'VE COME TO KNOW AND APPRECIATE SO DEARLY.

I SOUND TERRIBLE. I SHOULDN'T BE WAXING ON ABOUT HOW GOOD I HAVE IT. AS TERRIBLE AS THAT MAY SOUND NOW, I THINK IT WOULD MAKE YOU HAPPY TO KNOW.



MY THERAPIST AGREED THAT I HAD TO WRITE THIS NEXT PART. IT FEELS ODD TO SHARE SOMETHING SO INTIMATE, BUT HERE GOES.

SEX WITH STEVEN IS WONDERFUL.

THERE, I SAID IT. ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?

I HAVE WRITTEN, REWRITTEN, ERASED, TORN, AND CRIED OVER THIS SECTION A DOZEN TIMES ALREADY. I KNOW WHAT I KNOW, AND I BELIEVE IT TO BE GOOD. THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH.

...FINE. ONE MORE DETAIL.

HE'S AS CARING IN BED AS HE IS WITH HIS WORDS. AS HIS WORDS CARESS A WOUNDED HEART, HIS HANDS CARESS AN ACHING BODY.



FORGIVE ME. ACKNOWLEDGING THAT PART OF MYSELF HAS NEVER BEEN EASY. ODDLY ENOUGH, WRITING A LETTER TO A PERSON WHO NO LONGER EXISTS DOESN'T MAKE IT ANY EASIER.

I WISH SO HARD THAT YOU COULD HAVE KNOWN WHAT I KNOW NOW. WE WOULD HAVE GOTTEN THE FAIRY TALE ENDING WE EACH DESERVED, AND WE'D STILL BE TOGETHER.

I AVOID THE TRAIN STATION. I CAN'T STAND TO BE NEAR IT. THE SOUND OF THE HORN AS IT CROSSES A STREET MAKES ME SICK. HOW MANY WAYS AND HOW MANY TIMES WILL I HAVE TO REVEAL MY TEARS TO YOU IN THIS LETTER?

THE PAPER IS STAINED BY MY TEARS.



I PUT THIS LETTER AWAY FOR SEVERAL DAYS. I WAS DREADING SHARING THIS NEXT PART. HOW CAN A MOTHER BE SO CRUEL?

BUT FIRST, I MUST TELL YOU BROADLY ABOUT BEING A MOTHER SO YOU MAY COME TO UNDERSTAND WHAT I HAVE LEARNED AND HOW I NOW RELATE TO THE WORLD. SIMPLY BEING A WOMAN DOES NOT EQUATE TO MOTHERHOOD. IT'S A UNIQUE PERFORMANCE UNTO ITSELF—A MANNER OF NURTURING, LOVING, AND EXISTENCE THAT EXTENDS BEYOND THE CONFINES OF A MORTAL FORM. SO, TO SAY I AM A MOTHER IS TO OFFER ME PRAISE AND RECOGNITION FOR HOW MY VERY STATE OF THINKING IS EXPERIENCED.

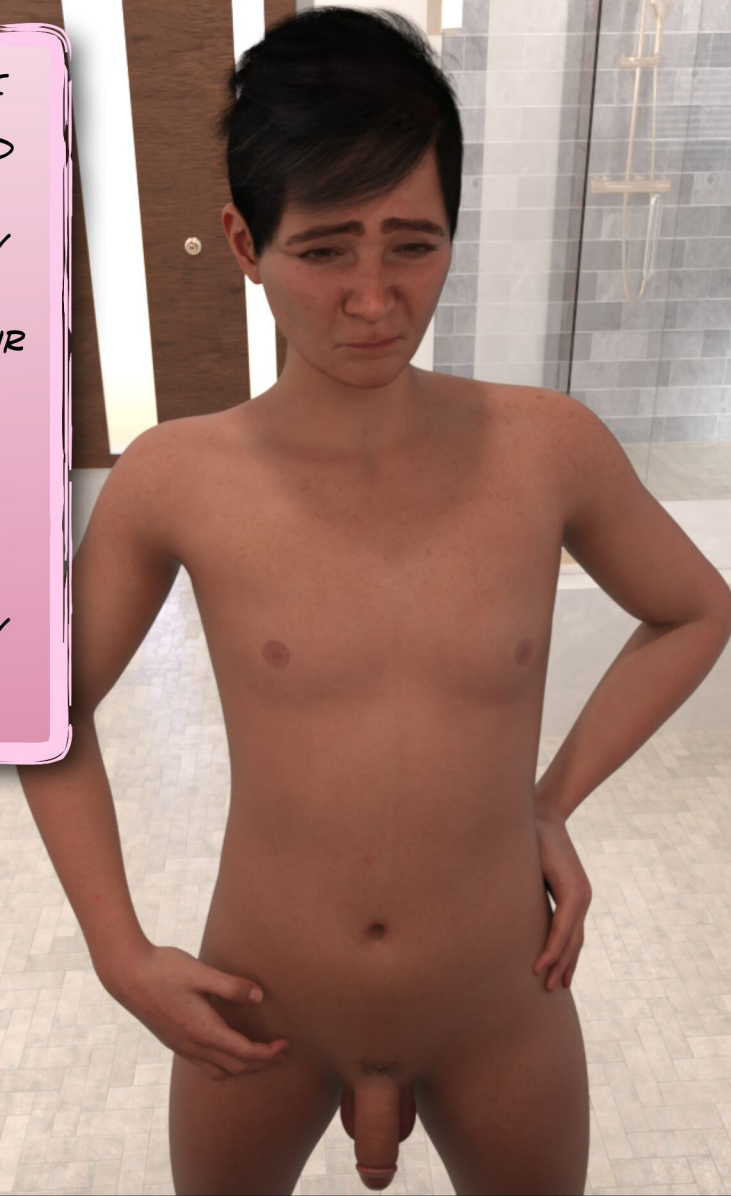
I SIMPLY MUST NURTURE. IT'S IN MY VERY CORE NATURE TO DO SO.



I FIRST RECOGNIZED THIS QUALITY WHEN I VOLUNTEERED AT YOUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. I DON'T KNOW WHAT COMPELLED ME TO REACH OUT, BUT I DID. IT WAS SCARY TO DO SO EVEN. I WONDERED TO MYSELF IF THE SCHOOL WOULD REJECT MY OFFER OF TIME.

OF COURSE, THEY DID NO SUCH THING. THEIR WARMNESS IN WELCOMING ME INTO THEIR COMMUNITY WAS ONE OF THE CRITICAL MOMENTS IN HEALING MY HEART. I DIDN'T KNOW I WOULD BE BAKING SO MANY CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES. I MAY HAVE INVESTED IN FLOUR IF I HAD.

SEEING THE FACES OF THE KIDS, TEENS, AND PARENTS AS THEY BIT INTO ONE OF MY CONFECTIONARIES SEALED THE DEAL. I WAS HOOKED ON HELPING OTHERS.



A photograph of a person's bare torso from the waist down to the thighs. Their hands are placed on their stomach, one on each side. The person is standing in a bathroom, with a white bathtub visible to the right and a tiled wall in the background. The floor is covered in light-colored square tiles. A white towel or sheet is draped across the bottom of the frame.

IT'S A MOTIVATIONAL FACTOR IN ITS OWN RIGHT, BUT I THOUGHT THERE MIGHT BE MORE TO TAP INTO.

SOMETHING MORE PERSONAL.

SOMETHING MORE... ME.

THINGS CONTINUED TO IMPROVE FOR ME OVER THE COMING MONTHS. MY UNSPEAKABLE ANGUISH WAS NO LONGER DOMINATING MY LIFE. I HAD A CONNECTION, A PURPOSE, AND SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO.

I HAD NO REASON TO REFLECT ON THE PAST FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A VERY LONG WHILE. I WAS DREAMING BIG. I WOULDN'T BE DENIED THE FUTURE I HAD ALWAYS WANTED FOR MYSELF.

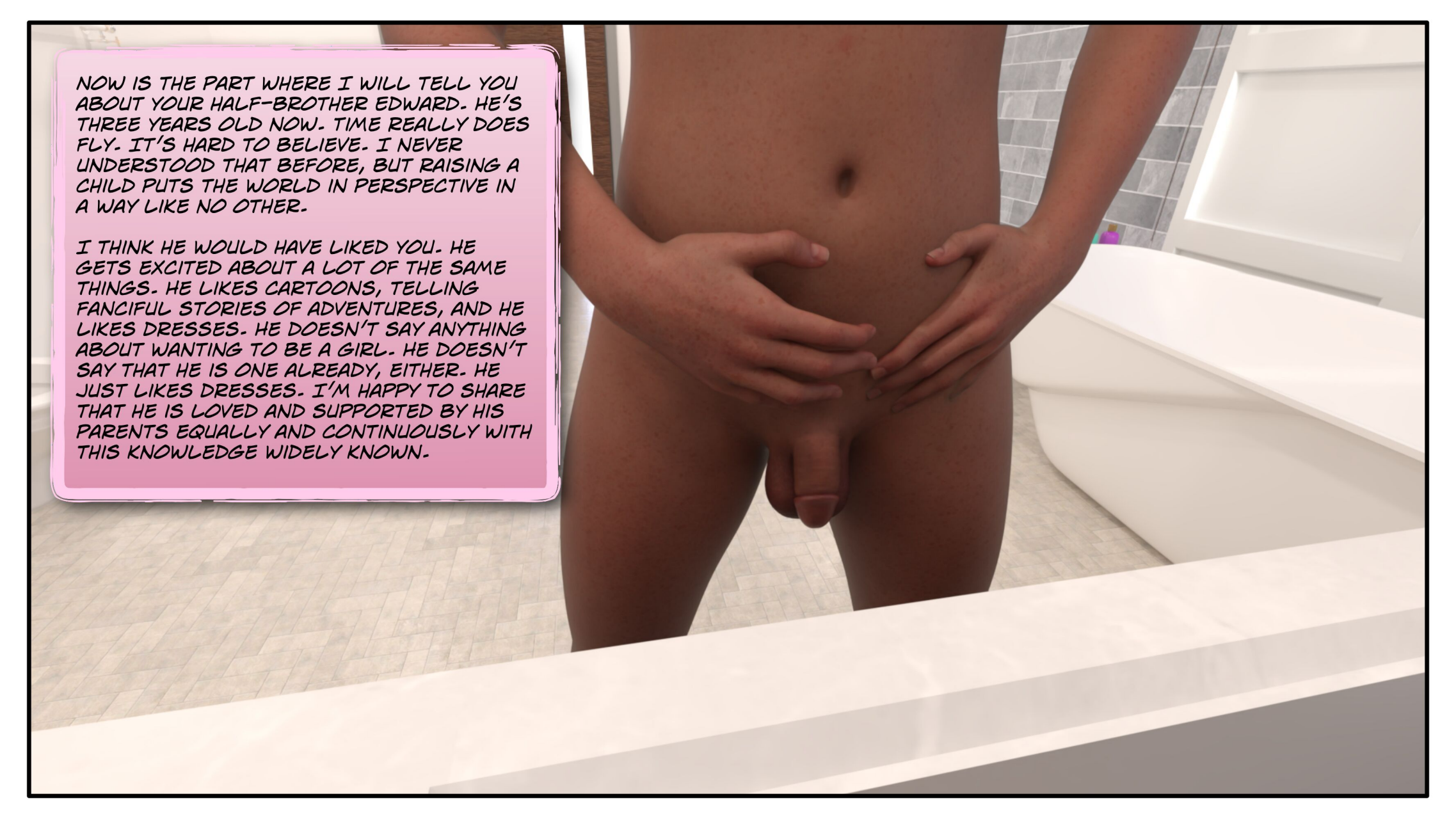
A photograph of a person's midsection and hands resting on their abdomen. The person is standing in a bathroom, with a white bathtub visible to the right and a tiled wall in the background. The lighting is soft and indoor. The person's skin is a light brown color. Their hands are positioned symmetrically on either side of their navel, with fingers slightly spread. The overall mood is intimate and contemplative.

ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER, AND WELL,
STEVEN AND I HAD A VERY SERIOUS
CONVERSATION.

I IMMEDIATELY KNEW MY ANSWER, BUT I
ENTERTAINED THE OPPOSING POSITION OUT
OF RESPECT FOR STEVEN. IT SEEMED FAIR,
GIVEN HOW BIG OF A STEP IT WAS FOR US
AND HOW RISKY IT WOULD BE FOR ME.

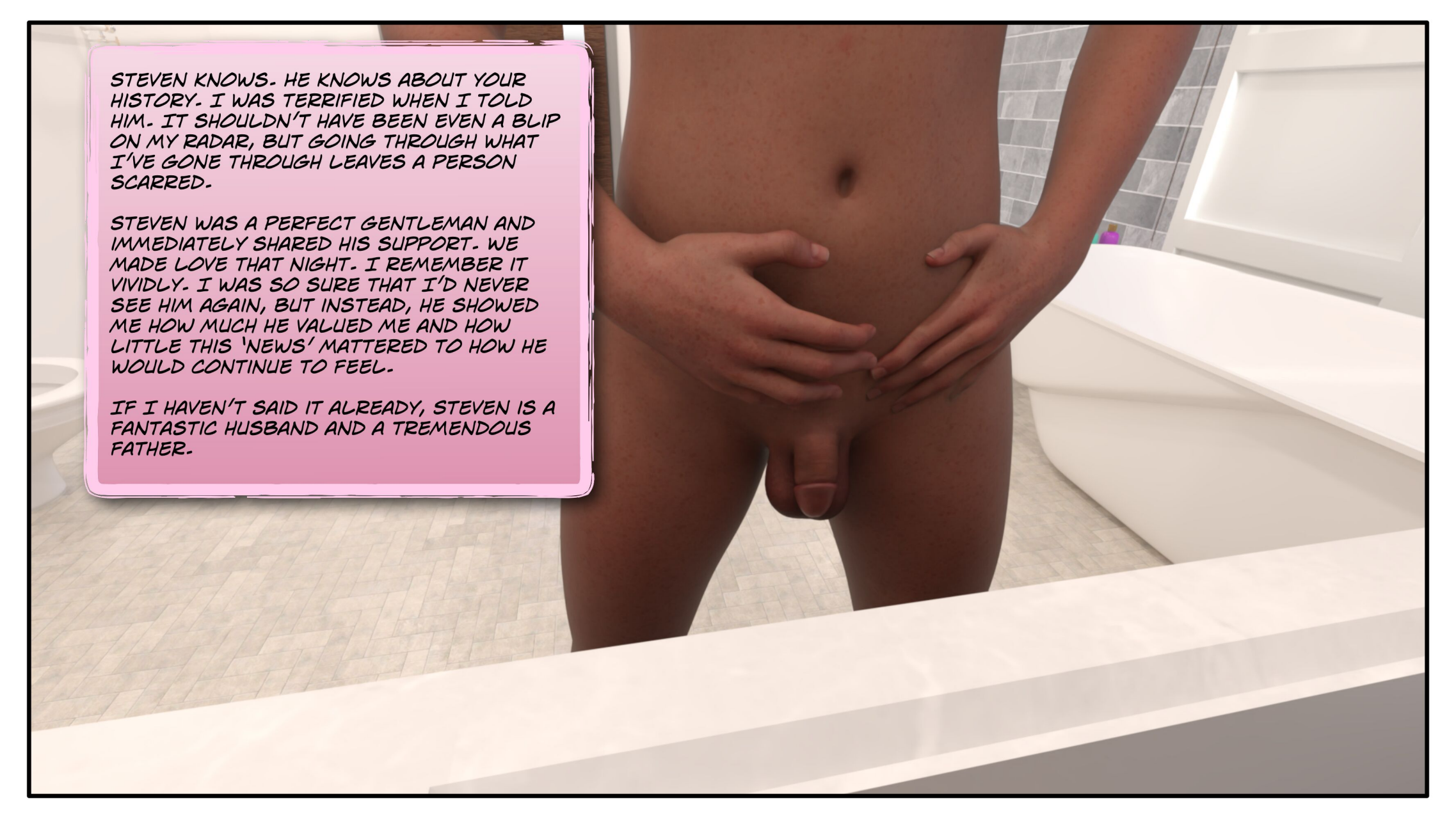
LET ME TELL YOU, YOU'VE NEVER BEEN
READ THE RIOT ACT LIKE YOU ARE WHEN YOU
GO TO YOUR DOCTOR AT 48 AND ASK ABOUT
WHAT I ASKED ABOUT.

TO SAY THE FEAR OF GOD WAS PLACED IN
ME WOULD BE AN UNDERSTATEMENT.
STILL, I HAD ALREADY MADE UP MY MIND.
STEVEN AND I WERE GOING TO TRY FOR A
BABY OF OUR OWN.

A photograph of a person's bare torso from the waist down to the upper thighs. Their hands are placed on their stomach, one on each side. The person is standing in a bathroom, with a white bathtub visible to the right and a tiled wall in the background. The floor is covered in light-colored square tiles. A white sheet or towel is draped across the bottom of the frame.

NOW IS THE PART WHERE I WILL TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR HALF-BROTHER EDWARD. HE'S THREE YEARS OLD NOW. TIME REALLY DOES FLY. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE. I NEVER UNDERSTOOD THAT BEFORE, BUT RAISING A CHILD PUTS THE WORLD IN PERSPECTIVE IN A WAY LIKE NO OTHER.

I THINK HE WOULD HAVE LIKED YOU. HE GETS EXCITED ABOUT A LOT OF THE SAME THINGS. HE LIKES CARTOONS, TELLING FANCIFUL STORIES OF ADVENTURES, AND HE LIKES DRESSES. HE DOESN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT WANTING TO BE A GIRL. HE DOESN'T SAY THAT HE IS ONE ALREADY, EITHER. HE JUST LIKES DRESSES. I'M HAPPY TO SHARE THAT HE IS LOVED AND SUPPORTED BY HIS PARENTS EQUALLY AND CONTINUOUSLY WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE WIDELY KNOWN.

A photograph of a person's torso and hands resting on their stomach. The person is standing in a bathroom, with a white bathtub and tiled walls visible in the background. The person's hands are placed on either side of their midsection, with fingers slightly spread. The lighting is soft and indoor.

STEVEN KNOWS. HE KNOWS ABOUT YOUR HISTORY. I WAS TERRIFIED WHEN I TOLD HIM. IT SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN EVEN A BLIP ON MY RADAR, BUT GOING THROUGH WHAT I'VE GONE THROUGH LEAVES A PERSON SCARRED.

STEVEN WAS A PERFECT GENTLEMAN AND IMMEDIATELY SHARED HIS SUPPORT. WE MADE LOVE THAT NIGHT. I REMEMBER IT VIVIDLY. I WAS SO SURE THAT I'D NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN, BUT INSTEAD, HE SHOWED ME HOW MUCH HE VALUED ME AND HOW LITTLE THIS 'NEWS' MATTERED TO HOW HE WOULD CONTINUE TO FEEL.

IF I HAVEN'T SAID IT ALREADY, STEVEN IS A FANTASTIC HUSBAND AND A TREMENDOUS FATHER.

BEING PREGNANT... AGAIN... WAS A WEIRD EXPERIENCE, TO SAY THE LEAST. STEVEN WAS SUPPORTIVE AS I EXPERIENCED MORNING SICKNESS. I DON'T BELIEVE YOU KNEW THIS BEFORE, BUT I HADN'T EXPERIENCED THAT SYMPTOM WHEN I WAS PREGNANT WITH YOU.

IT FEELS LIKE A LIFETIME REMOVED, REMEMBERING BACK ON BEING PREGNANT WITH YOU. IT'S STRANGE HOW THAT MEMORY POPS INTO MY MIND EASILY NOW. I GUESS THAT'S PART OF THIS WHOLE HEALING PROCESS. I REMEMBER A LOT OF THINGS NOW THAT I COULDN'T RIGHT AFTER... THE EVENT.

BEING PREGNANT WITH EDWARD WAS STILL DIFFERENT ENOUGH TO WARRANT TELLING YOU ABOUT IT.




IF I MAY, I'D LIKE TO BE A TAD INDELICATE FOR A MOMENT. PREGNANCY MAKES BOOBS HURT. NOT IN A GOOD WAY, EITHER. I KNOW YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT IT.

THEY GET BIGGER, SURE. THAT'S ALWAYS A BONUS. THEY LOOK DIFFERENT WITH DARKER NIPPLES, AND THAT'S ALL JUST BIOLOGY GETTING THINGS READY FOR BREASTFEEDING A BABY. BUT THEY ALSO ACHE! TOUCHING THEM CAN FEEL LIKE A THOUSAND NEEDLES BEING JABBED INTO THEM. OR, ALTERNATIVELY, LIKE GETTING PUNCHED IN THE CROTCH.

OH, ON THE TOPIC, CALLING SOMEONE A 'PUSSY' IS A TERRIBLE DENIGRATION. IT'S FACTUALLY INCORRECT. A PUSSY CAN TAKE A POUNDING AND KEEP ON GOING JUST FINE. TRUST ME...





SO, BOOBS TURN AGAINST YOU DURING PREGNANCY, BUT SO DOES YOUR HORMONES. I WAS SO QUICK TO ANGER THAT STEVEN HAD A STANDING ORDER FOR A QUART OF CHOCOLATE-MINT ICE CREAM AT THE GROCER.


HE WOULD STOP OFF EVERY DAY TO PICK ONE UP. MIND YOU, I DID NOT EAT A QUART OF ICE CREAM A DAY. NO, STEVEN JUST WAS THAT COMMITTED TO ENSURING THAT I WOULDN'T GO WITHOUT IN THE EVENT THAT MY BODY COULDN'T TAKE THE STRESS OF PREGNANCY HORMONES.



STRETCH MARKS ARE A THING, TOO. THEY HURT A LITTLE. LIKE A BIT OF AN ACHE, BUT ONCE IT STARTS, THERE'S NO STOPPING THEM.

STEVEN CALLS THEM MY TIGER STRIPES AND CONTINUES TO TELL ME I'M BEAUTIFUL. IT HELPS, BUT I WISH I HAD BEEN MORE DILIGENT WITH THE LOTIONS. MAYBE I WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN THEM SO BAD?


THE FIRST TRIMESTER CONCLUDED WITH SORE BOOBS AND THE CESSATION OF MY MORNING SICKNESS. THANK GOODNESS.



THE SECOND TRIMESTER WAS A COMPARATIVE BREEZE. WE GOT OUR ULTRASOUND. ALL THE TEST RESULTS LOOKED NORMAL, SO WE TOLD OUR EXTENDED FAMILIES. THAT LED TO STEVEN'S MOTHER DOTING ON ME CONSTANTLY FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NICER IF SHE HAD HELPED OUT MORE AFTER EDWARD WAS BORN. HER 'BREAST IS BEST' LINE GOT REALLY TIRED AFTER I GOT MASTITIS.

PRO TIP: DON'T GET MASTITIS. IT SUCKS!



FOR THE THIRD TRIMESTER, I WILL GLOSS OVER THE DETAILS MOSTLY. HERE ARE THE MAIN POINTS:

1. OH MY GOODNESS SO HORNY ALL THE TIME. THANK GOD FOR MEN. SPECIFICALLY STEVEN.
2. LEAKING BOOBS? REALLY?
3. BABIES MOVE A LOT.
4. MOVING BABIES ARE MURDER ON YOUR BLADDER.
5. EPIDURAL? YES, PLEASE. IN FACT, I'LL TAKE TWO.
6. MIRACLE OF BIRTH, YA DA YA DA...
7. OH MY, I HAVE A LITTLE BABY, AND I IMMEDIATELY LOVE HIM!



GOSH, REMEMBERING THESE THINGS IS STIRRING UP LOTS OF FEELINGS AND MEMORIES. I WAS SO HOPEFUL... YOU WERE SO OPTIMISTIC.

THINGS WOULD CHANGE, AND THEY WOULD GET BETTER. I REMEMBER YOU FEELING THAT WAY. YOU ALWAYS HAD MY SUPPORT. MY SUPPORT...

WHAT COULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

WHAT SHOULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

AFTER DISCUSSING IT WITH MY THERAPIST, HE SAYS THAT I NEED TO 'FORGIVE' MYSELF FOR NOT TAKING ACTION. I'VE BEEN GOING FOR SO LONG NOW THAT I ACTUALLY FEEL LIKE I BELIEVE HIM.

IT'S ALL MIXED UP, THOUGH.

THINGS CHANGED SO RAPIDLY. I MADE THE DECISION SO SOON AFTER THE EVENT. I HAD WANTED IT FOR SO LONG. YOU HAD...

WHEN I GRABBED THAT PILL...

MY FUTURE WAS ALL NEW, FRESH, HIGH POTENTIAL, HIGH REWARD, BUT ALSO... HIGH RISK.

THE EFFECTS STARTED QUICKLY. YOU WERE SO EXCITED. THE PAIN WASN'T EXPERIENCE WASN'T TOO BAD. I THOUGHT IT MIGHT HURT.

WE WERE PLEASANTLY SURPRISED.

WE...

WE GOT TO ENJOY SOMETHING FOR A MOMENT AFTER FEELING SO LOW.

NOW, IT ALL FEELS LIKE A MEMORY.



A FADED MEMORY AT THAT.

YOU ESSENCE... IT HAS... LASTING EFFECTS ON YOUR MIND. WELL, MY MIND.

I CAN STILL REMEMBER OUR LIFE, DON'T GET ME WRONG. THINGS ARE JUST... FUZZIER. IT'S NOT AS CLEAR-CUT AS IT MIGHT SEEM.

I KNOW WHO I AM AND WHAT I'M DOING. THIS LETTER WILL BE SENT TO NO ONE, NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE GONE—NOT LIKE THAT, AT LEAST.

MY WORDS ARE REACHING THEIR INTENDED RECIPIENT. EVERY WORD DOES.

'MY SON' IS GONE, BUT NEVER FAR AWAY IN MY THOUGHTS.

I WISH THIS WERE EASIER TO EXPRESS.



NO ONE CAN EVER FIND THIS. IT WOULD RUIN US. I HAVE TO PROTECT MY NEW FAMILY AT ALL COSTS. THERE'S NO CATHARSIS THAT'S WORTH JEOPARDIZING THEIR SAFETY.

SO...

...JUST... LET IT RIP.

I'M SORRY, I FORGOT THAT I WAS REALLY YOU. WHEN YOU DECIDED TO TAKE MOM'S YOURESSENCE AFTER HER ACCIDENT AND PRETEND THAT IT WAS 'ME' WHO PASSED AWAY INSTEAD... WELL, I NEVER THOUGHT THAT I WOULD FORGET.

HOW COULD I?

YOURESSENCE IS REGULATED FOR A REASON. MISUSE IS HIGHLY PENALIZED. IT'S NOT LIKE THERE IS A MANUAL ON HOW TO TAKE SOMEONE ELSE'S DOSES SUCCESSFULLY.



TO BE CLEAR, I AM AN IMPOSTER. I TOOK MY MOTHER'S YOURESSENCE AFTER HER DEATH AND CARRIED ON WITH HER LIFE AS THOUGH IT WERE MY OWN.

I WENT YEARS WITHOUT MUCH CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD. IT MADE THINGS... AWKWARD. I STRUGGLED, BUT I FINALLY HAD A BODY THAT DIDN'T MAKE ME HATE MYSELF. THAT WAS A RELIEF, AT LEAST.

WHEN I STARTED ENGAGING WITH PEOPLE FROM THE PAST, THAT'S WHEN THINGS STARTED TO GET COMPLICATED.

I STARTED TO FEEL DIFFERENT. IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT BEING IN A WOMAN'S BODY. THAT WAS DIFFERENT RIGHT AWAY. IT WAS "RIGHT" FOR ME, THOUGH.



TODAY, I'VE BEEN REMEMBERING MYSELF. A FEW YEARS AFTER THE EVENT, THE SAME THING HAPPENED, EXCEPT WITH MOM'S MEMORIES. I STARTED TO REMEMBER EVENTS IN MOM'S LIFE—NOT JUST EVENTS BUT FEELINGS AND MAYBE EVEN... HER THOUGHTS.

I REMEMBER GROWING UP WEARING DRESSES AND PLAYING WITH DOLLS. I REMEMBER MEETING DAD AS A YOUNG WOMAN. I REMEMBER BEING INTIMATE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THESE MEMORIES STARTED TO MAKE MY THOUGHTS MORE... COMPLICATED.

I FELT LIKE MY CHOICES WERE INFLUENCED BY OTHER FORCES. FOREIGN FORCES...

I THOUGHT MOM WAS INFLUENCING ME FROM BEYOND.



I LATER LEARNED THAT THIS WAS ALL A SIDE-EFFECT OF TAKING SOMEONE ELSE'S YOUESSENCE. I CONSIDERED THAT I MIGHT HAVE BEEN GOING CRAZY FOR A WHILE.

WITH THIS CONFLICT GOING ON, IT STARTED TO BECOME EASIER TO THINK OF MYSELF AS MADELINE, AS MOM. I SUPPOSE THAT WAS THE START OF MY FORGETTING WHO I REALLY AM. WHEN STEVEN SUGGESTED I SEE A THERAPIST ABOUT MY POST-PARTUM DEPRESSION, I DIDN'T EXPECT TO SPEND SO MUCH TIME TALKING ABOUT THE PERSON THAT I USED TO BE.

IT'S PERVERSE IN A WAY. I WAS TALKING TO MY THERAPIST ABOUT MYSELF THROUGH THE LENS OF ME THAT MY MERGED SELF HAD CREATED OF ME. I BELIEVED WITH MY EVERY FIBER THAT 'MY SON' HAD DIED WHEN THE EXACT OPPOSITE WAS THE TRUTH.



I WISH I COULD SAY THAT I REMEMBERED RIGHT AWAY. THAT WHEN THE THERAPIST STARTED DRILLING INTO MY DEATH THAT, IT WOULD TRIGGER ALL MY MEMORIES RIGHT THERE ON THE SPOT.

IT DIDN'T... I'M SORRY... I GUESS TO MYSELF.

BEING A MOTHER IS A FULL-TIME JOB. BEING A HOMEMAKER IS A FULL-TIME JOB. BEING SOMEONE WITH TWO IDENTITIES DIDN'T MAKE THAT EASIER.

I REJECTED THE SENSATIONS OF MY SENSE OF SELF. I DIDN'T WANT THE EXTRA BURDEN. I DIDN'T KNOW IF I COULD TAKE IT.

WHEN I FINALLY REMEMBERED THAT FATEFUL DAY, I CRIED FOR WHAT FELT LIKE HOURS. STEVEN TRIED TO COMFORT ME.



EVENTUALLY, MY THERAPIST SUGGESTED I WRITE THIS LETTER. NOW THAT I'VE FINALLY OPENED UP, I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT I AM FEELING BETTER. HOW CAN I FAIL 'MY SON' WHEN THAT PERSON IS ME?

IT'S A SILLY THOUGHT...

I REMEMBER HOW PAINFUL MY LIFE WAS, THOUGH. GENDER DYSPHORIA IS NO JOKE. DAD DID NOT MAKE THAT BETTER. MOM WAS A BIT OF A RELIEF; SHE DIDN'T PUSH THE TOXICITY ONTO ME. SHE DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANT TO BE TRANS, HOWEVER. SO, EDWARD CLEARLY HAS IT BETTER THAN I DID. SO, THERE MUST BE SOME OF THE ORIGINAL ME IN MY PERSONALITY, EVEN IF I DON'T SPECIFICALLY RECOGNIZE IT WHEN IT IS THERE.

I FEEL LIKE I CAN BE 'ME' EVEN MORE NOW THAT I WRITE THIS.



REMEMBERING BACK TO DAY 1, I WAS SO EXCITED TO TAKE ON THIS NEW CHAPTER OF MY LIFE. NOW, I CAN HONESTLY SAY THAT I EMBRACED IT FULLY.

I'M A MOTHER, NOT JUST THAT I REMEMBER PARENTING MYSELF. NO, I PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED THE WHOLE THING. I HAVE THE STRETCH MARKS TO PROVE IT. MY NIPPLES WERE BIT BY EDWARD TOO MANY TIMES TO FORGET BREASTFEEDING. I HAVE A LOVING HUSBAND AND A HEALTHY SEX LIFE. I HAVE GIRLFRIENDS AND PLAY EUCHRE WITH THEM REGULARLY.

ALL THOSE THINGS I WISHED COULD BE TRUE...

THEY CAME TRUE.

I AM MADELINE, MOTHER OF EDWARD.



I'VE CRIED TOO MANY TEARS OVER
THIS LETTER NOW...

REALLY...

I HAVE DONE WHAT I NEEDED TO DO; I
CONFRONTED THE DEMONS THAT ARE A
PART OF ME. IN FACT, MY SECRET
ISN'T JUST A PART OF ME. IT... IS...
ME.

SO, FOR THE LAST TIME, JEREMY, I
AM SORRY. I, FORMERLY JEREMY,
NOW MADELINE, APOLOGIZE FOR MY
MISDEEDS: FORGETTING MYSELF,
LOSING THE TRUTH THAT I CARRIED,
AND MISATTRIBUTING THE MEMORY OF
MY 'SELF' TO ANOTHER.

I WON'T FORGET AGAIN.

I CAN'T FORGET.

I...



...CAN NEVER ADMIT ANY OF THIS.



I WILL SAY MY FINAL PIECE. I HAVE THE LIFE I WANTED. I HAVE THE PEOPLE IN IT I NEED. I WILL NOT APOLOGIZE FOR WHO I AM OR WHAT I WANT. HOW I GOT IT, OR HOW I KEEP IT EVER AGAIN.

I WILL CLOSE WITH MY AFFIRMATIONS. I HAVE SO MANY THINGS WORTH FIGHTING FOR. WITH THIS FIGHT CONCLUDED, I WILL ENJOY A NEW PEACE.



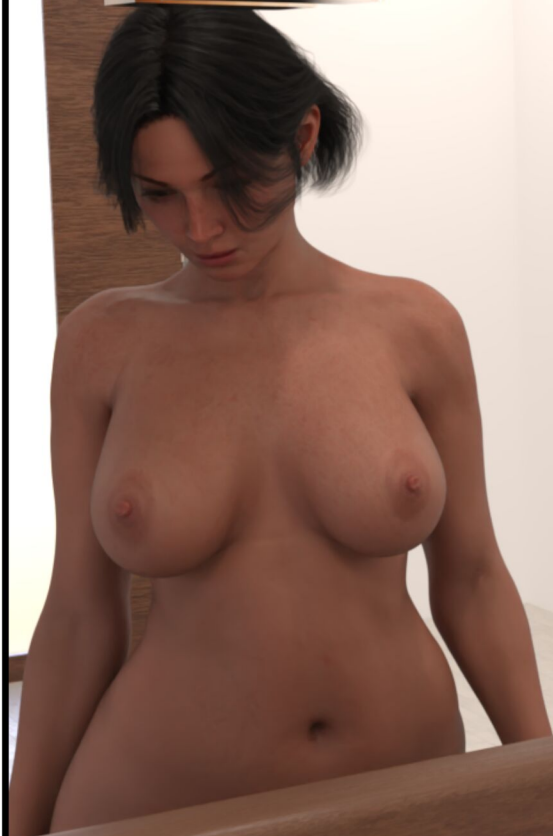
I LOVE MY HUSBAND.



I LOVE EDWARD.



I LOVE MY SON, JEREMY.



I LOVE MY UNBORN DAUGHTER.



I LOVE MY HUSBAND.



LOVE ALWAYS, MADELINE

