

On your first day of law school, you receive a call from an accountant informing you that you have been removed from his will. When you graduate three years later, he does not attend. Your father-in-law does, wearing a pressed suit. He gives you a Maxwell-Scott briefcase and tells you he is proud of you. You get your first job and move to your wife's hometown, where you can be closer to her family.

When you find out your wife is pregnant, you do not tell your parents. You tell your sister. "A baby," she keeps saying, over and over. She sniffs. It's only a phone call; you must be imagining that you can hear her crying. "I'll pray for a boy for you," she says.

Your wife goes into labor in the winter. You follow her into the delivery room, where the nurse pulls out a needle the length of her hand. You sway on your feet. Your wife sees you and yells at you to get out if you're going to faint.

You wait in the lobby for a nurse to come tell you it's done. You panicked and didn't wear a jacket, so now you're cold and alone in the sterile room. It's the middle of the night. You miss your parents. You want your mom to tell you what comes next. You leave a voicemail on her phone.

Five hours later, you meet your daughter. She has a full head of hair, and it is curly like her mom's. You touch her round cheeks. She is only a baby, but you think she has your mother's eyes. You look at her and imagine who she'll be in ten, twenty, thirty years. A nurse takes her away from you to swaddle her and you get upset—not like that, it's too tight, you'll hurt her. The nurse tells you all new parents are anxious. You stare at your daughter and swear what all parents do: that her life is going to be better than yours. You will make sure of it.

Ten hours later, your parents arrive. They must have started driving as soon as they heard the voicemail. Nobody mentions the years of silence. Your father holds your daughter, and you watch him carefully, making sure he holds her head correctly. "*I have held a baby before,*" he snaps. He turns to your daughter, and you see the ghost of a smile. "*Ah, my granddaughter.*"