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WHILE I FEED MY SON

It took me awhile to get the hang of it. Him, too. He would throw up almost every feed the first few days. “This is why people get the flap,” the nurse had said, but I didn’t want him to lose the ability to purge. He’s still a person, damn it, even if he can’t eat. Now, I can lock the extension in place, insert the syringe, and feed him his formula in less than ten minutes.

“You’re gaining weight, aren’t you?” He doesn’t acknowledge me, of course. I remember how much he loved bananas and wonder if he misses them, but I push the thought away; best not to dwell on it.

I click the extension in place. Insert the syringe. Formula is flowing. Ten minutes. I find the water stain on the ceiling, trace it with my eyes. It’s the shape of a speech bubble, and I imagine it belongs to another mother. Someone who’s made it to the finish line, whose kid has grown up and maybe even learned to walk or talk along the way. I think if I can just make out her words, I’ll know how to do it too. But I’m too fast now. I’m done feeding him before I can make out the message.

“Time for the exercises!” He hates the exercises, so I say it as cheerfully as possible. Sitting up, tummy time, kneeling, standing, grasping, reflex work, feeding, drinking, picking up, and dropping objects. He sobs nearly the entire time. I try to block it out. Try to smile. Try to talk over the wailing. “Buddy,” I say, changing his diaper. “I know this sucks, but it’s doctor’s orders.”

He stares at me with wet eyes. “I love you. I just need some help, Bud. You’re getting heavier, you know?”

But our break is here: Click the extension, insert the syringe, pour the