

Waiting Room

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I arrived late at the therapy center, of course. Amanda took forever to get dressed, and as much as I keep reminding myself she is only five, it still takes forever. I had to wake up Nate from his nap, and that's always the way. My luck.

So I was late. I got there, not too bad, maybe six, seven minutes after three. The front desk person gives me The Look, like I couldn't see the sign that sits on the counter in plain view, the sign that says, "No children unattended in the Waiting Room." I say, just to make a point,

-- I don't have a sitter. My husband is in Afghanistan.

Her look flicks away from my face, and I know she knows I remember the last time, when I left Amanda – just for a sec – with Nate while I was in the restroom, and wouldn't he have fallen just a little ways, hit his head on the corner of the magazine table, and of course he was screaming murder by the time I came out of the restroom, and now the front desk person is giving me her evil eye, like I don't remember, but what am I supposed to do anyway? I'm the 24-hour parent and Nate only seven months, already getting into everything with his scooting around that Amanda never did at his age.

And I hate myself asking Amanda, "watch your brother," if I can't be there every second, but what else can I do?

So I take them both and we sit down and I wait for the therapist to call my name, and I just wish things were different. I wish things were different, and I wait.

That night after I finally get the kids in bed I dream of Marco again and I wake up crying. He's only been gone a few weeks and already I don't think I can make it. The therapist said it's natural to feel alone and unhappy when your husband's in deployment, but that doesn't make me feel better. She said I should try deep breathing exercises, and I would have learned them if Amanda hadn't been talking to herself while she was playing with the little wooden dollhouse in the therapist's office and if Nate hadn't been pulling on me the whole time. She said I should imagine I am in a deep green garden with the sunlight dappling through the leaves – that's what she said, "dappling" – and the birds sweetly singing, and the wind softly blowing about me. But when I think of the garden, it only reminds me of the picnics Marco and I used to go on a long time ago, before I got pregnant with Amanda and we got married and Nate came along – before Marco went into the Army.

I hear Amanda wake up, I hear her whimpering. I wipe the tears from my face. I get up and I go into her room. I gather her in my arms. I hold her, I rock her, until she falls

asleep again. Sitting on her bed, with her in my arms, I think about the last thing the therapist said.

“You are a strong woman,” she said.

I hold onto that thought, that idea that I am a strong woman. I think about my babies, Amanda and Nate. They depend on me to be strong.

I see the therapist again next week. I take a deep breath. In, out. In, out. I think about a green garden with birds and a soft wind. I hear Amanda’s quiet breathing, feel Nate turn over in his crib in the next room.

And I wait.

END