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Modern Dad Missile

You know my husband. He's the handsome, forty-something guy who looks curated from the pages of *Modern Dad* magazine. You'll spot him outside the currently over-hyped café. He'll almost spill his thimble of gourmet coffee on his cream-colored loafers, and one single frown line will appear at the corner of his lips. He'll tug at his brushed-leather leash for his French bulldog, Colton Jr., and head slowly and deliberately down the street like all eyes are on him.

When Carl first says he wants a kid, I laugh. We're living in Park Slope and Carl's making good money as a commercial photographer. I'm working in public relations. We go out often, drinking top-shelf cocktails and eating expensive finger foods off miniature cutting boards. Two years can feel like two weeks in Brooklyn if you're in love and have the money to support that love.

Anyway. When I laugh at the idea of our child, and his one frown line comes into play, I know I've insulted him.

"I'm sorry, I just don't see it," I say, flipping my long hair, aiming to distract him. Hoping to look beautiful enough to inspire him to take out his Canon and photograph me. This is my favorite part about being with him: my social media is *on fleek*.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing. I'm just having a hard time picturing you changing a diaper," I say.

"Of course I can change a diaper," Carl sniffs. "But we would hire help, obviously."

That night, I let him take pictures of me in the bathroom—the kind of pictures he's always too respectful to ask to take. I'll be his living, breathing, posing play doll. I'll let him drape me over the edge of the shower or bend me over the sink by the mirror in my panties and a translucent robe. He likes when I'm "naughty" just for his lens.

There is so much persistence in Carl. It turns out to be the night I get pregnant with Tucker.

Yes, it's basically a vanity project. From the early-pregnancy sex in front of mirrors to the "I wonder if he'll have my jawline" comments,

Carl obviously wants someone to carry on his pristine family genes. He never asks me if I feel ready to be a mom. I don't think it matters to him. He was raised by a nanny, and so was I. We can afford childcare, and that's the modern way of knowing when it's time to have a child.

Our small wedding in Montauk goes smoothly, other than my brother setting fire to a trashcan and later trying to touch a passed-out bridesmaid. I hadn't spoken to him for years before and haven't spoken to him since.

For our honeymoon, Carl totes me tirelessly around the world as if to distract me from the fact that he doesn't want to have sex with my "balloon bod." He forces me to pose for pictures in front of famous landmarks, my malice hidden behind sunglasses. I start keeping tabs on him. All the reasons to leave form an invisible ink list that I like to review often.

When I was having some trouble getting it together in my mid-twenties, I had a therapist who would frequently say that marriage is just two people trying not to kill each other. The funny thing is, at the time, I wasn't married or even close to engaged. Her words often float back to me in tiny-yet-loud moments: Carl subtly removing his hand from mine as we walk past a supermodel on the streets of Rome. A quick, unhelpful look at me trying to fit into an old dress. A gentle curbing of my orders at restaurants. A request for me to climb eighty steps on a day when I feel particularly, painfully pregnant. He even tries to make me get my bloated butt up on a camel, just to get the stupid fucking shot.

"C'mon, Kris. Do it for Tucker," he says with his smarmy smile. So I do, while envisioning punching his teeth straight out of his mouth.

Click.

The joy that I get from that particular vision causes something to shift. And you know what they say: *what you focus on grows*. Before I know it, the visions begin to multiply. I start to spontaneously picture the worst things I can do to Carl in the most inappropriate situations: Pushing him out of the gondola in Venice. Smacking his plate of duck confit over his pressed, white polo shirt. Shoving his crisp, khakied ass into the muddy Seine. Jumping in the old elevator at the historic Spanish hotel, causing the rope to snap and us to plummet to our asinine deaths.

There are so many moments of sheer joy to be found in these fantasies. It's like my own nonstop personal horror/fantasy movie. Carl dies so many times in my mind that I begin to be nicer to him out of sheer guilt. It's for this reason that perhaps he allows me to relocate us to Boston. He doesn't know it, but it is the beginning of the very end.

I'm trying to get my cooking show passion project off the ground before the baby comes, and that all hinges on the recipe trials. We fight often, without any makeup sex to smooth it over. Sure, I provoke him. He seems so comfortable, and I am so very miserable. He would never slap me outright. Not Carl. That's *poor behavior*—as in, only poor people do it. Responses that burn like cyanide. His slaps come on the inside.

My black cherry trifle: "It isn't actually very good, is it?"

My wild mushroom soufflé: "You didn't quite pull it off."

My short rib pasta with fresh-grated horseradish cream sauce: "I can't eat this."

It gets to the point where I feel anger bubble up the moment my beautiful food touches his thin, pale lips. I wait for the frown line and brace myself for his remarks.

If this isn't abuse, I don't know what is.

I was taught by example that when you marry right, you never have to earn income again. So when Tucker is finally born, I quit my job. It's full-time work, being a mother. And that's most of what I focus on, really. I find a nanny who is recommended by the \$35,000-a-year preschool Tucker will eventually attend. Tina only interviews with me, as Carl is too busy to be bothered with such domestic duties. He does make sure I've checked her references, though. I guess he really cares when it can be linked to criticism of me.

I use my laptop in the same room as them at first, to make sure that Tina is engaging Tucker enough. He seems to like her a lot, so I ease up, go out for facials and avocado toasts. Tucker is like a small duplicate of Carl, a careful child who wants things to match, rules to be followed, and to always play safe. He learns language quickly and is quite verbal, offering compliments on stylistic choices and criticisms

on my cooking—in the exact same backhanded way that Carl does. I spend days perfecting my own baked eggs recipe. Tucker tastes it and immediately asks for an egg sandwich “like Tina makes.”

Fuming at the strength of Carl’s genes, I let Tucker go without breakfast. I will not hit my child, but I’ve now learned plenty of ways to hit on the inside. I fire Tina that afternoon.

To scratch the giant itch that is my life, I book a trip to Italy with my girlfriend. Carl supports my need for a “girl-time getaway.” Shelley and I have a great time. We drink all the wine. We eat all the food. We go on yacht rides. We get crazy at clubs. One night, I can’t keep my hands off some Italian bodybuilder. I’m pretty sure I stay faithful, although there are definitely some gaps in which I don’t remember anything but my hands on his bare-skinned torso.

When I return, Carl gives me such a dry hug that I stiffen immediately. The Mediterranean mellow I’d collected for myself shrivels and dies. I might as well have not taken the trip at all.

“We’re out of coffee,” Carl says.

Yes, I’ve heard the “*like mother, like daughter*” jokes. And sure, there are some parallels between my mother and me. And I use her divorce lawyer to start the divorce process behind Carl’s back, which just happens to be what my mother did to both my father and stepfather. But I am not my mother. It’s just a good exit strategy. Getting a divorce is like waxing your legs: it’s always better when someone else does it for you quickly and unexpectedly. I do Carl a giant favor, really.

I go into his study clutching the papers and say calmly, quietly, “Carl, I want a divorce.” It all pours through his face then, the most emotion I’ve ever seen him experience in one moment. His frown line deepens, eyes flashing with fury. I never see him shed a tear, though—not one, not in all the years I’ve known him.

He clutches at his chest in a way he’s never done before, and for a moment, I think he’s having a heart attack. But there’s no way it can be real. Carl eats steamed broccoli and egg whites for breakfast.

“This was always your plan, wasn’t it,” he says. It’s more of a statement than a question. I half want to say no just for the sake of argument, but

instead, I say nothing. I picture taking the pen and plunging it into his neck, only to discover that he has no blood on the inside. He's just an empty vessel. He looks at me and shakes his head, then signs the papers with a small sigh.

Tucker says he wants to live at his dad's. This is after he refuses to eat my cranberry scones, pronouncing them "too crumbly." I imagine the satisfaction of slapping him while the newest nanny washes the dishes. Tucker seems to sense this desire and sticks his four-year-old tongue out at me. Another brief fantasy flashes through my mind: me pushing him out of his seat, his face crumpling up as he falls to the ground. I have uncontrollable violent visions of hurting my son now. He has become a small version of Carl.

I'm a monster. In my heart, I know this. I've always been a monster. Maybe the real monster is my mother, and she gave me her mutant genes. Maybe we're all monsters, hurling missiles at each other. None of us have a chance of getting by without scars. My therapist says I should take it easy on myself. I think he wants to sleep with me.