Charlie's Angel

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By August, she’s sick and thinks she’s dying from cancer. Nausea in the mornings. She doesn’t make it to the bathroom anymore and throws up red cranberry juice across Charlie’s quilt. Wedding gift from his mother. Hands shaking and stained with liquid, she pushes the sheets back with her legs and rolls to the carpet below. She trips over the suitcase handle under the bed. The phone is feet away. She lies in an embryo of pain until the nausea subsides and passes. Softly, she rubs her vomit-covered fingertips into the carpet. Gentle, easy circles until the redness blends with the white. Pink—for a girl.

She calls Charlie, and by the time the screen door creaks open she’s taken a shower, perfumed the carpet, and soaked the comforter in cycle one of the washing machine. His face twitches with sympathy and says she still looks beautiful with her hair wet and uncombed. She is sorry, it’s over now, and she digs her sneaker into the carpet. He kisses her neck and her eyes close. She smells midnight three days ago and again last night, and then sawdust in his hair from the sofa factory. He lifts her chin and kisses her—this time on the lips. She tastes mouthwash and Wrigley’s gum and pulls away. He lets his hands drop and watches her eyes water. She takes his hand and guides it to her stomach. She watches his eyes carefully as they widen and then turn to meet hers. “I love you Chris,” he says and spins her around in circles until the sickness returns, and she doesn’t tell him in time to put her down.

You meet her in July after two years of proselyting on Barcelona’s beaches. You watch her from the pulpit; she flips her hair and glances at the wall clock. Ten minutes until sacrament meeting ends. Hot, in heat. You’ve seen her before.

You tell her your name is Charlie, like Chaplain but minus the mustache. She laughs and asks you for another Dr. Pepper, or do you drink those, being a good Mormon and all? You wink at her and order two cokes instead. Never give in. You smile and wonder if she’s used to the cafe scene, or just
knows she's your first date since your mission. She watches you and catches your eyes on her. She looks away. She's a game and you're winning.

On the way home, you sing Garth and tell her you lived in Florida four years ago and wore a thirty-pound Mickey Mouse costume one August and wiped kids' running noses off your shoulder for your summer job. You ask her if she's interested and she blushes. You jump her pawn. "Checkmate," you say as you pull into her driveway. "What?" she wants to know. Confused. You laugh and run your fingers through her hair. She flinches. "See you tomorrow," you say and leave your Queen defenseless and backed against a corner in her driveway.

In August she sleeps by the toilet and wears maternity dresses before she shows. Kao, her best friend, knows she's pregnant and sends her a card from Utah and a picture of her in the mountains wearing a backpack and 120 pounds of muscle. Chris feels her bulge. Charlie works double shifts on the weekends and comes home to shepherd's pie and frozen chicken stew left thawing in Ziplocs on the counter. He finds her sleeping on the used sofa factory couch, a gift from his high school girlfriend turned barmaid, who, on last account, was working for "Easy Pete's" a block east of the San Diego Naval Base. Charlie slams a cabinet door shut to wake her up. He waits for her eyes to shift to him before he smiles and says, "I'm sorry honey, go back to sleep." She pushes herself up on the cushions and smooths her hair. "No, it's okay," she says and follows her husband to the kitchen.

She dumps a can of chicken soup into a microwave dish. Costco brand. He takes off his shoes and waits at the table. She pours his milk and sits across from him as he eats. "Priesthood basketball game tonight. You coming?" he asks. The nausea builds. "Uh, no," she says and holds her belly. "Can you wash the dishes?" she asks and hobbles to the bathroom.

She wakes up at two-thirty, finding him next to her smelling like sweat and the boys' night out. Same as the night before. His sleeping arms are draped across her chest and they become heavy. She rolls to her side, the lingering sweat making her stomach ache. She watches the Seth Thomas on the wall tick slowly . . . the beats in synchrony with her heartbeat . . . her child's silent breaths. She rubs her stomach and feels the gentle swelling rise, forming a small knot across her abdomen. She sighs and reaches for her clothes.

In the kitchen she finds the sink full and Charlie's dishes still lying on the table. She moans and frowns. Filling the sink with soapy water, she reaches for his cup, then plate and silverware. His dishes from breakfast and lunch the previous day join them. Then the beer mugs filled with Pepsi and Kool-Aid from yesterday's living room baseball party with the sofa factory's movers and shippers. She washes each article and hangs them to dry in the racks. Her stomach begins to ache. Her head throbs . . . its power drips slowly downward, through her garments, leaving a puddle of tears on the floor.
His mother calls at nine the next morning. “I hope I didn’t wake you up,” she says and laughs. “Of course not,” Chris responds and rolls over in bed. His mother pauses. “When I was pregnant,” she says, “I made casseroles on Saturdays and froze them. When I was sick, I thawed them for Charlie’s father. Soup can’t sustain a man,” she adds. Chris sighs. Charlie tells his mother everything.

She spends the morning ironing his Sunday shirts and dusting the corners of the den she had hoped to use. The desk is old, vacant. She flips through an *Ensign* lying on the coffee table. Cover of a mother holding a baby. Her calling. Charlie’s dream. She puts the magazine down. Her eyes shift toward the wall. There she finds Charlie’s diplomas lining the walls. High School, Lifeguard, Eagle Scout and Most Valuable Player—Stake Soccer Team. Undefeated Champs—’79. She pulls her hair back, looking for hers. Young Woman of the Year. Most likely to Succeed. Merida High School. Honor Student. Gold seal attached, tassel hanging off the side, gathering dust. “Chris Andrews” it reads. Calligraphy ink still fresh. She follows the framed papers and watches as the print grows larger, overshadowing the fineness of her own. Charlie Robinson. Mr. Charlie Robinson. Robinson, Charles. The name unchanged throughout her husband’s career. Chris Robinson. She pulls at her wedding ring, tight around her swollen finger. Chris Andrews. Chris Robinson. A changed name, a changed life.

Your mother fixes you cold sandwiches and washes your football uniform while your father takes you hunting in the mountains and drives you to the college basketball games. Your sisters play the piano and take art lessons, and you wrestle and find a dog under the Christmas tree when you are ten. Your mother reads romance novels about Southern belles and shows you pictures of cover models with clean-cut haircuts and bulging muscles. She tells you to be just like them. Brave, strong, a provider. You turn sixteen and bring girlfriends to Sunday dinner. “I want to cook,” you tell her. She waits in the living room until the smoke alarm sounds and then tells you to leave, to let her do it. You smile and serve your date a casserole that your mother denies she made. “I love you,” your mother tells you and musses your hair. “My wife will be like you,” you tell her. She smiles and raises your allowance.

The nausea builds. “Uh, no,” she says and holds her belly. She has Cup-O-Noodle waiting for him when he comes home that night. “Is this it?” he wants to know. “Budget,” she tells him. “I should have gone to school . . . ,” she mutters. Charlie sits back in his chair and closes his eyes. He pushes his hair out of his face. She expects an outburst but he turns to her and rubs his temples. “Don’t start Chris,”
he says. “You didn’t have to marry me.” She turns away. He eats his soup. She washes his dishes.

He sleeps with white gym socks covering his toes—naked chest mummified between the blankets. She smiles and watches his fitful sleep. She kisses his chin and he stirs and then turns on his stomach. Unable to sleep, she rises and eases herself to the carpet below. She pulls the suitcase from under the bed. She pulls the flaps back. Her childhood. Vocabulary flash cards, freshman year homecoming corsage, sixth grade birthday cards, I-love-you notes from her father. She finds the envelopes from Skip at the bottom, postmarked Guatemala. “Remember how you couldn’t go to the bathroom in public places by yourself . . . always made me stand outside? Couldn’t see that people were looking at you because you are beautiful, not ugly. And you wouldn’t buy a dress until Kao saw it, made sure it looked right. Be yourself Chris, before you be someone’s wife . . . .” Chris folds the letter and puts it in the suitcase. Sighing, she looks upward at the wedding picture glowing on her dresser. White lace and covered canvas hiding teenage acne. She reaches for it, to hold the innocence, but stops. Holding her breath, she closes the flaps and slides the suitcase under the bed. She moves to the hallway where the light shines through the facade of happiness. There she sobs.

In Barcelona, on Mondays, you watch bullfights and Flamenco dancers with black pointed tap shoes and hand clickers. You play the piano in high-o from the street urchins with dirty fingernails and split ends and give them complimentary books if they’ll tell their parents about the men in dark suits.

She dates Skip, a skinny lacrosse player from across town. He’s in her ward and brings petunias to her when she turns sixteen. She works three to seven cleaning rat droppings from the floors of the day-glo, neon-signed pizza parlor in the college district, and she thanks God that she’s making enough to pay for a new sweater every month. She eats egg yolk shakes on Saturdays to grow a bra size before graduation and the trip to Mexico with her friends afterward. She wears tank tops because she has the body and Skip tells her he likes them. She takes the S.A.T. before her cap and gown come in the mail and she sweats in front of 500 friends at Senior Awards. Class President.

Skip asks her to Prom, but he buys a stereo and runs out of money a week before, so he cooks spaghetti for her at his house and feeds it to her with chopsticks. She loves him and tells her mother that she is getting married, she’s never met anyone like him. Her mother laughs and says she is too attached. Skip leaves on his mission two weeks later.

He shaves with slow, even, perfect strokes. He hears the door creak open and watches his wife’s swollen body reflected in the bathroom mirror. Two months left until the baby, thank goodness. He is tired of pregnancy. She smiles when she notices his glances and stands beside him, leaning on the counter for support.
She is huge. "Hey beautiful," he coos and ruffles her hair. "You look like an angel." She smiles. "Have you seen my toothbrush?" she asks, opening drawers. He nick his chin. "Damn!" he mutters and reaches for the Kleenex box. She sees the toothbrush's tail lying beneath a mound of wet towels on the floor. She tries to bend over, using the counter for support. "Charlie," she says, out of breath. "Can you get that for me?" She motions her head toward the ground. He nods through the mirror. "Uh, just a minute," he says and dips the razor in the sink. He starts to shave the other side of his face.

The phone rings and she's reading about Lucy and Cecil and closed-off rooms in a place near Spain across the Atlantic. It's long distance from Provo—Kao calling in between her German and sociology classes to tell Chris happy birthday. Chris is twenty. Kao is almost twenty-one and has a boyfriend and a '93 used Jetta and makes straight A's with a few B's in math and physics. She slam dances with fifteen boys a night and wears short skirts without pantyhose to church. She graduates two weeks after the baby's due and is driving out to California if that's okay with Chris. Chris looks at her husband, flossing his teeth in the mirror—L.A. Rams in a too small T-shirt over a mid-twenties protruding belly. Charlie's pregnant too. "That's great," she says and hangs up the receiver.

"My wife will be like you," you tell her. She smiles and raises your allowance. You pick her up with Garth in the background and she winces. You smell like Old Spice and breath mints and you know she thinks you're the "winer and diner" type. You drive for two hours in circles around your neighborhood, telling her that you don't know why you asked her out in the first place, she's so young. Seventeen. She laughs and says, "Take me home then." She doesn't mean it and you know you're in control. You tell her that the weather in Spain is sticky, hot. She tells you about the keg party (she didn't drink though) that kept her out all night and how her parents called the police trying to find her. Grounded for a month. You say, "I can't even remember high school." She looks out the window and feels young. You pull into the Bank of
America parking lot and come back ten minutes later with five twenties. Your
eyes flash. “Let’s go to Mexico,” you say, your eyes glinting in the sunlight. She
laughs nervously but doesn’t say no. You get to Anaheim and take the off ramp
to Disneyland instead. She’s already changing her name, seeing how it sounds.

Chris Robinson. It’s past curfew. She doesn’t call her mother this time.

The next day is Sunday. She is released from being Sunbeam teacher. The
baby kicks her side. The wedding band is tight, constricting against her finger.
She twists it off and leaves it in his coat pocket. Fingers swollen and red. Scarred.
Charlie stands at her hip in the hallway. The twenty-one-year-old returned mis­sionaries tease her. Skip emerges from a classroom, young brunette on his arm.
Back for five months now. Tan and filled out. “Name the baby after me, Chris,” he
jokes and pats her belly. Charlie laughs and watches him. He remembers Skip. He
reaches for Chris’s hand. He holds it tight.

Three weeks later she’s baking potatoes and running the whites on the low
cycle when her water breaks across the kitchen floor. She calls Charlie but he’s on
lunch break—eating tuna fish sandwiches on a park bench with balding men who
each have children from three different marriages. She waits forty-five minutes,
and Charlie pulls up scared that she called an ambulance already and that’s $500
they don’t have down the drain. At the hospital, he sees jars of urine on a gurney
and decides to wait in a vinyl sit-back chair between two novice grandfathers who
don’t care what the hell he saw, he should be in there with his wife. Charlie closes
his eyes and prays for her, and for a son.

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the baby to her
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So innocent.

Propped in metal leg
clamps, hair tied back in a pony­tail with hospital-issued rubber
bands ruining her hair, she
clenches her hands against the
bed rails and stares at the
“focus” picture on the wall: a too
thin mother wearing rouge and
her hair in ringlets, holding a
perfect baby that doesn’t cry. She
tells the nurse to call her mother.

Chris’s mother and
daughter arrive five minutes
apart. Her mother’s mascara runs
with joy and she cuts the umbili­
cal cord off the firstborn. The sweat sticks to Chris’s brow as she reaches for her
child and calls Charlie into the room. She holds the baby to her breast and calls her
an angel. So innocent. She names her Madison—the big ten college where she
almost went. Her mother sighs and strokes her daughter’s hair—the cycle ofMotherhood complete.

Charlie tells the grandfathers in the waiting room that his daughter is perfect, just like his wife. She doesn’t cry. Tiny, gentle, a perfect angel from God. He tells Chris that Madison is going to be the best mother in the world. Just like his mother. He looks at Chris. “You have to teach her.” Chris nods.

Kao arrives the following Saturday. She holds the sleeping baby and tells Chris fifteen times, “I can’t believe you actually have a baby. I can’t imagine that in my life right now.” Chris smiles faintly and tilts her head. She sees her body two years ago—it’s Kao’s now. Size six. Chris folds her arms, hiding the fat. The baby cries and Chris shakes out her hair and goes to the kitchen. Kao follows her, holding the baby. “Beautiful,” she says to the newborn and taps her fingers on the formica. Chris doesn’t turn around. Kao watches her friend. “You seem happy,” Kao ventures. Chris turns her head and smiles faintly. “I am,” she says and reaches for the glasses. “Is married life everything you imagined?” Kao asks. Chris feels in the cupboard for spoons. “More,” she says. Kao waits. Chris sits across from her, looking at her lap. “I’m not ready for this,” Chris says suddenly and reaches for her baby. Kao closes her eyes. Chris sighs and runs her fingertips across her forehead. “You’ll get through,” Kao says finally and watches her friend slowly stir the liquid until the cheap tea powder dissolves into nothingness. It was all that she could say.

She finds the acceptance letters on the kitchen counter and calls you with the news. Four of them. Wisconsin, a Big Ten school in the East, a small private liberal arts school, and San Luis. You’re finishing at Santa Barbara next winter and want her to stay. She whines, “What do I do?” You take her to dinner and let her decide. “I don’t want you to worry, to struggle,” you say. “I want to provide for you.” She looks confused. You think she’s pondering marriage. She’s thinking about being a CPA. She has the brains but doesn’t think so.

Kao stays for a week and sleeps on the couch at nights. She wakes up in the moonlight to the baby’s cries and through the cracked door hears Charlie roll over. He tells Chris to “take care of it this time. I’ve got to work tomorrow. I’m the one making the money around here.” Kao sees her friend’s face and knows that they both remember when childhood Monopoly money could buy the world . . . and a nanny too. When twenty dollars a week could buy new mascara and a movie ticket and that equaled happiness. In the moonlight, Kao watches her friend yawn from exhaustion, hold her child to her breast. Kao watches her but does not speak. Chris’s eyes flicker, then shut. A time before. Wedding announcements, bridesmaid dresses—peach. Lavender flowers on the table. Cold shrimp before the reception dinner. A .75 diamond, like in the magazines. The first night.

She watches Kao drive away the next afternoon with enough money for a shake and gas until Utah. An eternal tan and sleepy Saturdays to look forward to without checkbooks, arguments, and dirty pans a husband won’t wash. Holding her baby, spit-up running across her shoulder Chris stands, a blank look across her eyes. While her daughter naps she goes to the bedroom and calls her bishop. A half hour later, they are sitting on the couch. “I don’t want to be a wife anymore,” she tells him. The bishop is surprised. “Marriage isn’t easy,” he tells her. “No one ever told me it would be hard,” she says, and looks out the window.

Two weeks before she packs her bags for Madison, you tell her that she is beautiful and can be a CPA but should be your wife instead. She stands next to you and laughs, but you give her a ring and tell her to think about it. You leave a rose on her doorstep the next morning with a promise to never leave her. The next night you’re at the beach; it’s almost dark, and seeing her face makes you know that this is forever. She watches your face, waiting for Skip to appear. He doesn’t. She rises and runs toward the water, yelling “yes” over her shoulder. You are faster and drag her to her knees before she reaches the sea.

It’s their second anniversary and Charlie takes her to dinner in the city. He orders salmon for him and a salad for her. She always gets salads. She interrupts the waiter. “I want a steak,” she says and folds her hands across the table. Charlie smiles and rubs his neck. She excuses herself and walks toward the bathroom. A million eyes are on her back, watching the insecurity drip from her pores and run into her bra. Breast milk.

The next day is Tuesday and Charlie works late. The bishop calls at seven and she tells him that she’s thinking of leaving, for awhile. The bishop tells her that Charlie loves her and to support him. Running away is not the answer. She says she doesn’t know what she wants, but she knows Santa Barbara doesn’t have it. The bishop tells her to wait. Charlie comes home at eleven to a note on the counter. Canned soup. Fifth day in a row.

The fourth of July falls on a Friday. He wakes up late and stretches in the bed. His wife sleeps near him, not touching his body. He pushes the hair from her face behind her ears. She is beautiful. Twenty and young and his. She stirs and he feigns sleep. She knows he is awake. She rises and goes to the baby’s room. He can hear her on the monitor. She laughs and tickles the baby that looks like her. Minutes later, she brings Madison to the doorway. She says, “Charlie, can you hold her while I make breakfast?” Charlie listens, eyes closed, and turns over. He wants to sleep.
In the afternoon, Charlie comes home sweaty and dirt-covered from the ward baseball game. "We won," he tells her as he kisses her on the forehead. She looks tired and he doesn't say anything. Madison cries on the floor, diaper wet. She is reading. The house is littered with formula, toys, and newspapers. "The baby," Charlie says and points to the crying infant. Chris turns a page. The phone rings. Charlie holds his hand over the receiver. "Can you get me something to eat?" he asks and turns his back. He says that he'll "be over in a minute" and hangs up the receiver. Chris continues to read. His eyes grow dark and his face turns red. He snaps his fingers. She doesn't move. "Do your damn job!" he says and slams the door. Glass shatters on the sidewalk. She hears him curse as the car starts and peels out. Chris picks up the baby and stares at the infant absently.

Her mother sews beads on a dress and you help her pick out the flowers. She sends creme-colored invitations to your mother's house and orders raspberry punch for the reception. Her maid of honor leaves for BYU a week after your honeymoon and calls her at your house the night you get back and wants to know what sex feels like. For a moment you remember that she's eighteen, but she loves you and will listen to Garth if you ask her. You go to Yosemite for a week and backpack in the mountains because you like camping, and she will too if she tries it. You come home and start school and work the next week. Her friends are young and buying ski clothes for Utah and Colorado winters, and she feels old wearing a gold band. You know what she's thinking, so you buy her an old white house with a cracked and peeling picket fence. Traffic buzzing outside your window. You move in and hang your diplomas on the wall. Next to hers—a team. After a week she's bored and wants to go to college, to get a job, to move to Mexico and learn Spanish. You tell her she doesn't have to work, you'll work for her. It's your job to make the money. She says she had a job in high school. You roll your eyes and remind her things are different now. She goes to sleep early and you call your mother and ask her what she does all day. She laughs and tells you Chris needs a baby.

Charlie sleeps in the sofa factory, and she calls her mother and tells her to put sheets in her old bedroom. She packs clothes and baby diapers in the suit-
case. But when she tries to carry it and Madison to the front door, the weight is too heavy. The bus drops her off near the campus and her mother is waiting across the street in a Seven Eleven parking lot. Chris is wearing shorts to her thighs and her legs are tiny. No garments. Her mother reaches for the baby. She sees her daughter's legs, her eyes, the redness, and doesn't ask questions.

That night, Chris sleeps in her bed with the ruffled comforter, flower sheets, and teddy bear wallpaper. She wakes in the heat, in the stillness of the night, Charlie not sleeping beside her. She moves to the bedroom floor. She unzips her suitcase. Another letter from Skip. "You always knew how to break a heart. You're breaking mine now... You aren't invincible Chris, and you know that. Someday it will be your turn. You can't win at everything." Chris lets the letter fall. She follows the outline of her room with her eyes. Dark shadows of yearbooks, a record player. A make-believe wedding. Kao is the groom and Chris is in her bathrobe. The wedding march fuzzes as the needle hits a scratch. Chris takes Kao's arm and together they follow Hunter and Maxine, the soap opera stars, down the isle. There's a commercial interlude and the girls giggle at what comes next.

Her mother doesn't come in the next morning when the phone rings. It's Charlie. Chris packs her suitcase while she waits for him. She sees the record player in the sunlight and moves to it again. The wedding march, two years later. The record spins and the needle lowers. She can't hear the music over the scratches.

Charlie drives up by twelve and has the baby in his arms before Chris can get out of the bathroom. She throws up again and this time Charlie hears. He pounds on the bathroom door. "Let me in." She doesn't answer. Moments later, it is silent and she opens the door. He sits in the hallway, Madison squirming in his arms. "Are you okay?" he asks. She nods. He looks at her and says nothing as Madison begins to cry. He hands her the baby.

She takes Madison to the park the next morning. She is building a sand castle with Tupperware bowls as Skip sits next to her and her daughter. "Hey," he says and digs a hole in the sand with his hand. He is tall, dark, wearing jeans. "I... I'm leaving next week," he begins. "Going to Boston, economics program. Saw you walk over here, wanted to say good-bye." She smiles, and squints in the sunlight. Her daughter plays in the sand. Skip touches the baby's arm. Madison giggles and Chris shakes her head. Skip stands and brushes sand from his pants. "I'm proud of you Chris," he says. "You're a great mother." Chris looks at the sun. "Well," he
says, "take care of yourself." His eyes flicker in the heat and he puts his hands on her shoulder, squeezing it gently. Chris watches him walk away—her life fading in the sunlight, passing her by, growing smaller as her daughter grows older.

You think canning beets and carrots will make her happy for a year, but your mother says that you never did understand women, what they want. You tell her that she sheltered you, that Chris is different. She’s modern. Your mother thinks she wants too much. "She should be grateful she doesn’t have to work. What a blessing. What a good husband you are Charlie." You know she’s not happy so you tell her that you want a baby. She calls her mother and two days later tells you she’s picked out the names and what colors she wants for the baby shower. Kao comes home for Christmas. She’s made it into BYU and goes skiing every Tuesday. You sit on the couch, watching Kao feel her stomach, giggling and blushing because she knows where babies come from. You roll your eyes and tell Chris that you want to stay home tonight, watch a movie. She looks disappointed. You kiss her and she smells like an angel, tiny and fragile. She wants to go roller skating, cheer in a football game, and wear short skirts to the dance club in town. You’re twenty three and can’t understand why she doesn’t want to make love on the linoleum floor and watch the football highlights afterward.

She thinks about Skip and feeling trapped and Madison in the next room. About not having enough money and having too much useless time. About going to a school where her admission was accepted two years ago. About bringing Madison with her. She thinks about wearing short dresses and writing to Skip. About walking to the bathroom by herself. Wearing the same ring as the man who wants to mold her—a man and a system that has molded her. She thinks about ways out, reasons to stay, where she would go, what she could be with a high school diploma and a baby. She packs and unpacks her suitcase for five days before she calls her bishop in the middle of the night. "How are things?" he asks her and crosses his fingers. "I'm staying," Chris answers, and hangs up the phone before she changes her mind.

You come home late that night and she has chicken and dumplings warming in the oven for you. You’re expecting soup and are surprised when she hugs you. You eat while she vacuums the den and then your bedroom. The vacuum hits metal. You stand in the doorway as she leans to the ground and pulls the mass from under the bed. Slowly, she opens the flaps. Almost full. You watch your wife, confused. Chris looks at you, eyes fixed. Slowly she unfolds her clothing. Standing, she hangs dresses and shirts in the closet. You wonder where she was going, where she has been. You want to ask her but the room is silent, still. You do not move. She finds the college acceptance letters, the unfilled job applications, and Skip’s letters at the bottom. Sighing, she rests the
papers in her lap. One by one, she rips the documents and lays the remnants in the trash can. You don't know what she's thinking. She knows you never will. Her eyes burn. The baby monitor clicks and Madison’s distant crying fills the room. You stare at Chris, unmoving. You ask what you already know the answer to. “Aren’t you going to get her?” “In a minute,” she says, and tears a paper in half. You watch and wonder why her eyes are red, running. You stand in the doorway and turn toward the crying, your daughter waiting in the next room. Suddenly, all is still. You look back, and your angel is gone.

Jana Scott is an English major from Agoura Hills California. She likes to run, read, and study feminist criticism.