

Warning

WARNING: Young Children Can Strangle
in the loop of pull cords, chain and bead cords,
and cords that run through window coverings.

(The cord grasped by tiny fingers, so tiny. The yank, the squeal of laughter. She spins, she dances, her own two legs still a miracle beneath her. But then: the cord catches under her chin, she falls. The falling is what does it. Suddenly the cord has a life of its own, and its life is to take her life. Her eyes are wide open, not in terror, but in a new, strange kind of not-knowing. She is learning what it is to feel a cord twisted around her neck, the impossible swallow of strangulation. She would cry out for her mother except that she has no air—

and anyway this mother is in the office down the hall leaning into a ledger, lower back aching. She's contemplating the finances, the finances and how, damn him, her husband should be helping. Hasn't she been working all day, and then to come home to this—their baby, the wobbly front step, the running of the household, the voice message that he is working late again.

The finances and, as she leans in, the stink of diapers on the sides of her fingers. She's damn certain *his* hands never smell of their baby's shit. God forbid that he should ever be marked by parenthood. When was the last time *he* changed the baby, and was it her nagging or what that made him do it.

She rehearses. She needs more participation from him, she'll say, using all the crap strategies from the Communicate with Passion seminar. Focus on impressions, ask questions, use "I" statements. But it won't work. Her *I think, I feel, I hope, I need* turns into slants of rain that simply

wash over him. Forever he will hang his socks over the end of the bed, socks spongy with gym sweat, but still he insists that they're not dirty—which is when she realizes. She feels the silence of the house begin to choke her. She knows

and worse, that's also when she hears the door open. Him. It's him home and despite everything she's wanted to be the best mom the best damn mama and never did she—and she is running slipping on the laminate flooring—flying down the hall and getting to the nursery just as he does, just as he's glancing in, thinking of nothing more than waving at her girl as he passes, she gets there just in time to see *work hello bedroom socks tired my tie dinner you how* vanish from his face until she doesn't know doesn't know but also somehow knows but never did she—and all she can think before his head swivels back to the nursery and he runs to their girl and pulls her up—all she can think is that this is not the parenting moment I wanted to share, not this,

no)

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