

Warped Glass

By Kat McGowan

“It’s been three minutes.”

Marina could feel pulsating Florida hotness spread from her nose and cheeks, down her sweaty chest, standing with her arms crossed on the small screened-in porch at her friend Nora’s.

“Fuck, fuck fuck.”

“Do you want me to go check?” Nora asked.

“No. Yes.” Nora nodded, hesitated, and went inside, leaving the sliding glass door open. Marina felt bile rise up in her throat. She shoved it down like she did at the CVS when the wall of tests filled her vision. Like she did on Thanksgiving at home, getting sick before she had even eaten anything. Marina hadn’t put two and two together then, not until this week, and even then, it took Nora three days to convince her to buy one, take it, just to make sure. Marina realized she was hyperfocused on a leaf stuck fluttering under the gap in the screen and the red stucco patio. She strained to hear Nora’s movements over the reality show in the living room. Nora padded down the hallway, opened the door to her room (a framed poster of Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon always knock-knocked when the door opened) and went into the bathroom. Marina heard Nora’s footsteps go from muffled carpet to tile. Then it was easy to pick out Nora crossing the few feet to the top of the toilet, where Marina had left it on its own wrapper. Marina listened, but Nora wasn’t calling out to her. She wasn’t running out of the bathroom laughing with relief. Marina clutched the railing.

Marina’s hand plunged into the dirt, scraping her hand around the knobby root. She pulled straight up, but not before giving it a slight wiggle to loosen the smaller, denser tendrils. The invisible

roots gave way and Marina watched her fist emerge from the base of the crabgrass. Surface-level vines connected her bunch to other crabgrass patches, and the motion raised a web of angular wires, most still resisting their evacuation and requiring an extra tug. Tossing the weed to the side, she reached for the new rain lilies to plant alongside the path in the garden. She lost her balance on the balls of her feet and fell back with whiplash. Marina wasn't used to her growing belly yet, nearly four months along now. She steadied herself, in a kind of crab walk, one hand on the sidewalk behind her and one on top of her abdomen. She knelt forward.

"Babe?"

"Ari, hey, I'm okay." Marina looked up to her wife, swinging out of the back door and there so quick they both nearly fell again. Ari's curly hair was in her face.

"He's gonna have good balance, I guess," Ari cracked up.

"Oh, he'll have to learn to deal with this clumsiness for another six months." Marina picked up the too-dull spade she had discarded in frustration earlier in the gardening. This was the first time she'd ever owned any patch of land, like own own, with her name on it, so she told Ari she was going to make a garden out of it. ("Make a garden? Do a garden? Whatever, I'm gonna garden, okay! Shut up!") And even when they found out she'd finally gotten pregnant, she would bring a tumbler of lemonade out to the only piece of furniture that was there when she and Ari moved in- what looked to be a child's stool from three centuries ago, and work almost every afternoon and sometimes Saturday mornings. She always started out hot and angry, not knowing whether the red rashes blooming on her ankles and her wrists were from the sun or from the bramble that covered the tiny yard. She was making progress, if only because when she went at it long enough, by the time the shadow of the house crept up on her, she'd settle into the scent and the motion of the work. The backs of her legs would burn, then become a game of pressure. One leg, then the other, when she shifted her weight, she could plant pentas and cactuses like nothing. Lay down mulch, chalky gravel, peppery dandelions.

“What else do you think he’s going to be like?” said Ari. She wiped the sides of Marina’s sweaty lemonade glass before putting it on the skinny diner counter in their kitchen and patting the stool next to her. Her elbow rested on the counter and cradled her chin. Marina’s nails tapped on the Formica.

“Well, if we get our money’s worth, a Yale graduate with an athletic build and fantastic genetic health.” Marina made an exaggerated happy face.

“Okay, I was trying to think of the unlimited possibilities of a new child, but I guess let’s be sarcastic instead,” Ari sniffed and leaned closer. “I bet he’ll have my eyes and my nose and my hair and my temper. Oh wait, he’ll have yours.”

“No. Not- We discussed this! My egg and a sperm donor. Your last name. We discussed it! Come on, I’m already driving myself crazy thinking what is being passed down through me... I know my side is a bit of a wild card. But that’s why we sprung for all the other certainties. Like the Yale graduate. And guess what? We’re having one. A baby! This one.” Marina pointed.

“Oh, that one?” Ari shook her head and smiled.

Marina scooted her right foot up on the chair, the outside of her knee digging into the plastic armrest. The waiting room was key-shaped. First through the double doors was a narrow hallway, where the desk ladies helped locate the appointment set for her. Then the room opened into a semi-circle, floor-to-ceiling thick frosted glass in a concave grid of 5-inch square tile reaching around the scattered patrons back towards the desk ladies. The thick glass tiles distorted the outside world into Impressionism. Army green at the bottom, lighter green on top of that, the leaves and bushes. Then blurry gray and white sidewalk, with figures looking less like humans and more like aliens with brochures in folding chairs. Sun streamed in as much as it could through the top few rows of the glass surrounding the circle of chairs, beams coming through warped, flung to every curve of the walls. She

waited for hours, a whole afternoon. The doctor that finally came gave her a paper cup of two pills, and two more to take home. Before she could take them, they had to do an ultrasound. She turned towards the door so she didn't have to see. She could hear the heartbeat. By the next morning it was over. The red stains on her hands and thighs were the only proof.

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Marina came in through the dark door, shaking off the South Florida rain, so hot it made her rain slicker warm. Ari was taking something out of the fridge, still in her casual Friday clothes.

“Hey babe- how are you?” Ari turned and as Marina collapsed on a stool, kneeled level with her navel. “And hey, baby. So how was work?”

“It was fine, I made pretty good tip- what is all this?” Marina saw two cupcakes in a cardboard box sitting on the counter.

“Well, I got you a present, and I thought it was important enough to need the accompanying cupcake.” Ari grinned. Marina grimaced. Ari grabbed a manila package from the coffee table and prodded Marina's back with it before setting it in front of her. Marina bent back the clasp and felt the bubble wrap and a solid white box the size of a book. It read “DNAptitude” in rainbow letters.

“I can't take this test.” Marina looked shell shocked.

“Why? Don't you want our little boy to know where half of him came from?”

Marina felt her ribs crashing together like sea floors making mountains.