

# Of Silence and Slow Time

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*Thou still unravished bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time . . .  
—John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”*

The restaurant door was a heavy brass-and-glass affair that opened outward in the old style instead of sliding. Marina’s cheeks prickled in the rush of warm air and the smell of cooking food made her stomach rumble. Her hair whipped around and clung to her face as she unwound the wool scarf from her neck.

The restaurant was crowded and presumably quite noisy. People stood in bright-coated clumps near the entrance, waiting for tables; a lucky few were squeezed onto one of the two benches. Beyond the silhouetted heads clustered around the bar, two white-shirted bartenders shook and poured drinks with practiced speed. Marina gripped her shoulder bag, afraid of jarring its contents in the press of people. The coolpack was padded, but it didn’t hurt to be safe.

The host appeared and said something. Marina smiled at him but shook her head. “I’m meeting someone,” she said loudly. He gave her an odd look, and Marina wondered if maybe it wasn’t as noisy as she’d assumed. She pushed her way into the dining room.

Jeff was at a window table, facing in her direction but looking outside at the bundled people hurrying up and down Michigan Avenue. Marina threaded between the white-draped tables until she was only a few feet away, then stopped. Jeff had been a jeans-and-sweatshirt man in their college days, never very concerned with style. Now he wore a deep maroon shirt with black paisleys and a classy onyx pin at the throat. He glanced up and saw her.

There was a pause while he stared at her, and then he smiled and stood up. “Marina,” he said, holding out a hand. She took it, warm and rough against her own. Familiar, after all this time.

“Hi Jeff,” she said.

Then their hands dropped, and she busied herself with unbuttoning her long coat and draping it and the scarf over the chair before she sat down. The shoulder

bag she placed carefully at her feet where it wouldn't get jostled by a passing waiter. "How have you been?" she asked when she was seated.

"Oh, good, I guess," Jeff replied, and something else that she missed. He shrugged, seeming uncomfortable. The next part was indecipherable, but she caught the word "surprise" and then "after the way things ended."

She blinked once, hard, trying to concentrate, shuffling phonemes around in her head. A long "e," an "f" or a "v," an "m" . . . "surprised to hear from you." That seemed to fit.

For a moment she considered explaining right then, but decided it was too dangerous. She needed time to feel him out, first. "Oh, curiosity, mostly," she answered. "It's been more than four years." She shrugged, smiling a little. "Don't you ever wonder what happened to people you used to know?"

He stared at her. Marina gripped her hands together under the table but returned his stare calmly, still smiling. "Yeah, I guess I do," he said. He leaned back and began unrolling his linen napkin and arranging the silverware in a precise row on the white tablecloth.

Marina realized the first move was up to her. "So, are you—" She broke off as a waiter appeared beside their table and looked at her expectantly. Flustered, she glanced down at her menu and ordered the first thing she saw, an enchilada platter. The waiter punched their orders into his pocket computer. His hands were thin and delicate, the nails short. The computer spat out a printed ticket; he placed it on the table and was gone.

Marina took a deep breath. "Are you still at GeneSys? Susan Li told me you'd hired on there, but that was a while ago." She sipped at her water, trying to downplay the importance of the answer.

"Yeah." He nodded. "In fact,"—something—"promoted in October. Senior Research Director, if you can believe that," Jeff said, shrugging a little. "Pissed off a lot of people who thought I'd been promoted over their heads. They all want the pick"—he'd moved his hands apart, no, it must be "big." Or "bigger." Celery? That didn't make any sense. Oh, "salary." Then "nobody" with a shake of the head, and a garbled string. Marina blinked rapidly, trying to make sense of it, to keep up, barely catching the next part: "—seventy-eight-hour work weeks." Or maybe it was "seventy- and eighty-hour work weeks." Marina suppressed a flare of irritation. It would be easier with the interpreter, except she was afraid it would alienate her from Jeff even further.

Jeff paused. "And you? Are you still painting?" With one hand he rotated his water glass, sunlight reflecting sharply off the ice cubes.

Marina was concentrating so closely on his lips that it took her a moment to realize his eyebrows were raised. He'd asked her a question. Painting. "No," she answered quickly. "No. I haven't painted since . . . right after college."

Jeff looked genuinely disappointed; he said something that ended with her name, then cocked his head. “So what are you doing now?” he asked.

“Oh, I’m still an artist. Limited-edition holographic jewelry.” She touched her pendant, then held it out for him. It was a hologram of a huge spreading apple tree, her first really successful piece and a sentimental favorite.

Jeff leaned closer, squinting a little. Her name again, and she caught nothing else except the last word: “real.” He glanced up, looking astonished. She studied his expression and decided he hadn’t seen all of it.

“Have you ever read the Bible? Genesis?” she asked.

He frowned. “Yeah.” There was more, but once she had the affirmative Marina didn’t try to figure out the rest. He peered at the pendant again, jaw dropping when he saw it, and she couldn’t help grinning. She’d camouflaged a serpent among the tree branches; it was hard to see, yet once found it seemed obvious.

Jeff blinked and shook his head. “That is really rare.” He mouthed the words slowly—the first thing he’d said so far she didn’t have to struggle to decipher. Suddenly he jumped a little and turned to the left, glancing over his shoulder. “Sorry,” he said. “Somebody broke a glass or something back there. Startled me.”

She nodded, dropping the pendant back to her chest. After twenty-seven years, she was used to having people react oddly to sounds she couldn’t hear.

Jeff watched her with narrowed eyes. “You never got an implant, did you.” His expression was disapproving. “You spoke so well, I thought maybe you had . . .” He waved a hand vaguely around his ear.

“No,” she said. “Just speech therapy.” This was too close to the reason for their breakup four years ago, and she didn’t want to talk about it now. She pulled her interpreter from the bag at her feet and thumbed it on. She had thought Jeff would feel more comfortable if she could look at his face rather than down at a screen, but she’d forgotten how much *work* it was to lipread, and how easy it was to miss things.

“Anyway,” she continued, “Iridium Gallery just down Michigan here started carrying my pieces last summer, and they’ve done real well. Better than I’d hoped.” She had fought long and hard with the owner, who had wanted to feature the fact that she was deaf in the little plaque of information about each artist. Marina had adamantly refused. She wanted people to appreciate her art for itself, not out of misplaced pity for the “disadvantaged” artist.

Just then their dinners arrived, and when Marina saw Jeff’s grilled swordfish she wished she’d taken more time with the menu. Jeff noticed her gazing at it and insisted they trade.

“Grant—my roommate—is a vegetarian, so I don’t get to eat a lot of fish,” she explained. “We trade off cooking, three nights apiece per week. Although he owes me a week or two at least,” she added, rolling her eyes. “Somehow he’s always on call at the hospital when it’s his turn, never mine.”

“He’s a doctor?”

Marina chewed and swallowed, shaking her head. “An ob-gyn. Serving his residency at UIC, and they just work him to death up there.”

“Ah,” Jeff said noncommittally. “I—” usually? generally? Marina wasn’t sure. “—eat out. I hate cooking for just myself.”

She tried to appear casual. “You could cook for your girlfriend.”

“I used to, but she left me two years ago. I think she ate my Jill.”

Marina glanced down at the interpreter, startled. The last line read, [I think she hated my chili.]

She suppressed a giggle. “Oh, that’s a shame. You did make excellent chili.”

“Aha. Then you had no excuse for leaving.” He smiled easily, and the look in his eyes was indecipherable.

Marina glanced away; suddenly sober. A single red carnation rested in a glass bud vase behind the array of condiments. The outer petals had begun to shrivel and turn dark. “We just lived in different worlds, you know?” She looked back at him. “Hearing and Deaf. It was too much for me. I didn’t mean to hurt you, I . . . I was just too young to end it with any grace.”

“It’s okay, really.” He seemed uncomfortable again, and changed the subject by telling her a joke about the Bears, who had had a particularly dismal season. She had to read it off the screen, but it was still funny, and Jeff seemed pleased when she laughed at the punch line.

They talked about inconsequential for a while. Marina found herself watching his face, the line of his eyebrows, the way one side of his mouth smiled before the other. She remembered him sitting on her bed, laughing up at her; hunched over the Scrabble board, frowning and chewing on his lip; the way he used to gaze at her so intently just before he kissed her. . . . Her heart turned over a little. She realized, all unexpectedly, that she’d missed him.

“I miss hearing your laugh,” he said, breaking into her thoughts. “You have a beautiful voice.”

That sobered her up. He had told her that so often while they were together that the phrase had taken on overtones of reproach. As a compliment, it was meaningless to her. Why should she care what her voice sounded like? It was her mother who had forced her through years of speech therapy, and while it was occasionally useful to be able to speak directly to hearing people, it wasn’t how she *communicated*.

Jeff took a long drink, draining the glass, then set it down heavily. She felt the thump through the table and tensed. “So,” he said. “Is Grant your lover?”

Marina breathed out, relieved. “Oh, no. No, he’s gay. We slept together once, mostly out of curiosity, but I don’t think his heart was truly in it. He tried not to let on, though, so not to hurt my feelings.”

Jeff nodded, his expression betraying nothing.

“I’m going to get pregnant,” she blurted, then cringed at the way it must have sounded. She hurried to explain. “I’ve wanted a baby for years, but couldn’t afford

it. Now my jewelry is selling well enough, and Grant will be around to help out at first. So I'm going to get pregnant." She took a drink of water, more to keep herself from saying anything else than because she was thirsty.

Jeff looked only slightly puzzled at the change of subject. "Mother" was all she caught. Marina glanced down at the screen. [Wonderful. I'm sure you'll make a terrific mother.]

"Perhaps." Marina picked up her spoon, began playing with it. Now. She had to say it now.

"Jeff," she said, and waited until he looked up at her. "I want to have a Deaf baby." She mouthed the words precisely, barely voicing.

He stared at her, turning incredulous as it sank in. "Marina!" He paused and looked around, and then began again—more quietly, she supposed. [Marina, you can't be serious! They located those sequences—god, twenty-five years ago at least.]

She caught her breath for a moment, hurt. "No. Only twenty-four." The reason for everything, for her own existence.

He grimaced ruefully and leaned back, avoiding her gaze. "Of course." There was an awkward pause.

She had been not quite three when the last sequence of genes responsible for hearing impairment was located on human DNA, and hereditary deafness was added, with fanfare, to the list of afflictions no child would ever have to suffer again. She remembered the day: her mother had been crying, her face red and frightening, and she had pushed Marina away when she tried to crawl in her lap for comfort. As she grew up, they hit her with it again and again, her mother in resentment, others in pity. "Three more years," her mother would say when Marina did something clumsy, as if her mind and fingers were as useless as her ears. "Just three more years and I could have had a normal child."

Marina shook off the memory. "I want to have a Deaf baby, Jeff. And I need you to help me."

He stared at her, eyes widening as the implications sank in. She spoke before he could begin voicing objections. "Look, it's not as bad as you think. I'll get you the fertilized eggs; there ought to be examples of all the necessary gene sequences there already. All you have to do is run a virus through and splice them together, right?"

Jeff was shaking his head, spitting out words she couldn't understand. Her gaze flickered back and forth between his face and the interpreter screen. [You have absolutely no concept—] He broke off suddenly and looked around them. "Shit." [These tables are too close together.] He handed a card to a passing waiter, who ran it through a reader on his belt and returned it. Jeff rose, grabbing his coat from the chair.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go walk by the lake."

"It's freezing," she protested.

"It's private," he replied, and started for the door.

Awkwardly she grabbed her things and hurried to catch up.

They walked along a winding path in the park, not speaking. A squirrel ran across in front of them and skittered up a tree trunk, tail flickering in agitation. Snow was piled in drifts around the benches and shrubs, and two and three inches high on the thicker tree branches. An occasional gust of wind scattered the flakes like dust. Eventually they reached the lakeshore. Jeff brushed snow off one of the rock steps and sat down, and Marina did the same. He turned to face her.

“Your deafness puts you in a—” Marina couldn’t make it out. She held the interpreter up where she could see it. [—puts you in a high-risk group for genetic defects.] Marina started to protest, but he shook his head and kept talking. [As soon as—I’m sorry, but most people *will* see it as a defect. As soon as your ob-gyn confirms you’re pregnant—and legally, you know, you have to see a doctor within five weeks of a possible or suspected pregnancy—she’ll take an embryonic sample and have a full workup done. Furthermore, again because you’re in that high-risk group, they’re going to want to know who the father is, or at the very least a short list of possible fathers, and they’re not going to take “I don’t remember” as an answer. And if you tell them a name that doesn’t match with the gene typing, you’re in big trouble.]

Marina looked up again when the words stopped scrolling. “I’ll tell them the truth. Grant has agreed to be the natural father.”

He digested this for a moment “Does Grant know about all of this? That his baby will be deaf? And he approves of it?”

She shrugged. “He knows. He supports my choice.”

“He’s deaf too?”

“No, he’s hearing. His parents are Deaf, though, and his older sister.” For a moment she thought of Nancy with envy. How much easier it would have been to grow up Deaf-of-Deaf.

“Huh.” Jeff stared at her, then shook his head dismissively. “Okay, so you name Grant as the father. But there’s no way those gene markers are going to get past whoever does the typing. As soon as the test results come back, they’ll perform replacement therapy on the fetus, and you’ll have a hearing child anyway.”

Marina nodded. Grant had raised the same objection—and then, to her immense relief, had provided a solution. “Besides research, GeneSys also does standard lab work, right, gene-testing embryo cell samples and so on?”

Jeff shook his head, which made her heart drop for a moment, until he began to speak. [They have to. Part of the government contract. But that doesn’t mean—]

She didn’t wait for him to finish. “Okay. So I go to a gynecologist for a checkup. She sends the sample to GeneSys for testing. Then all you have to do is make sure it comes up clear. Change the label or something. I know it’s not your department, but it shouldn’t be that hard.”

“Whoa, Marina. Slow down.” He took a deep breath, and began ticking items off on his fingers. [First of all, there are a half-dozen other biotech companies in the metro area. What are the odds that your doctor even sends her stuff to GeneSys?]

“So I go to a different doctor. One that we know uses GeneSys.”

“Second, that’s not just ‘not my department.’ It’s not even close. It’s—” Marina couldn’t make out the rest. Annoyed, she looked down at the interpreter again. [It’s on the other side of the building.]

She felt everything slipping away from her. “And the ‘Senior Research Director’ doesn’t have a passkey?” She smiled at him sidelong, making it a challenge.

Reluctantly, Jeff chuckled. She waited a moment, then sneaked a look at the screen to see what he’d said. [Well—yes, actually. My card would open those labs. But I don’t have any reason to be over there, and if someone came in . . .] He shook his head, sober again. [I’m afraid there would be a lot more involved than changing a label. I’d have to *find* it first,] he said, gesturing with both hands. [They’ll have the doctor’s name on them, but not the patients’—just an identifying number . . .] He trailed off, thinking.

Marina smiled to herself. He was seeing it as a puzzle now, an exercise in logistics. She remembered the brilliant premed student who read mystery novels through an entire semester of biology, and broke the curve on the final anyway.

“Wait a minute.” He shook his head, frowning. “There’s something I don’t understand. [How are you going to get the fertilized ova to begin with? No, wait—] He grimaced and held up a hand. [I can imagine how you can get them fertilized, that’s not what I meant. But you’d have to have them extracted later, and you need to see a doctor for that.]

“Oh. That’s the easy part.” She pulled her shoulder bag around, found the coolpack and handed it to Jeff. “Already been done. Grant fertilized them. He’ll reimplant the altered embryo, too.”

“This?” He pulled at the Velcro and peered inside. “These are your ova?”

“Not just ova. Embryos.” She made a face at him, trying to lighten the mood. “It wasn’t nearly as steamy as you seem to think. Grant opted for the old petri dish. He said it would be easier that way, but *I* think he just didn’t want to embarrass us both by trying to screw me again.” Jeff just stared down at the rows of vials nestled in the coolpack. She couldn’t see his lips from that angle, but the cursor moved across the screen. [How many are there?]

“Twelve. Grant thought that would be plenty, but we can get more if you need them.”

[Uh, no. This should be more than enough.] Then he caught himself. [*If* I were to try to do this. But I don’t think you truly understand what is involved here, what you are risking.] Carefully he closed the Velcro strip. [The government takes its Child Protection Acts very seriously.]

“No. Believe me, I know exactly what is at stake here.”

[Then why? Why do you want this so badly?]

She looked at him, surprised and a little angry. “I’m Deaf,” she said. “You *never* really understood what that means. I have not, as everyone seems to assume, lived

my whole life wishing to be a part of the hearing world. I wouldn't even be the same person, if I could hear. Deaf is my identity, my culture. It is a whole community, with its own customs and a language that is graceful and unique and expressive of ideas your English can never contain. And the government," she twisted the word bitterly, "has decided that we are 'defective' and must be exterminated."

She looked away from him then, out at the water rushing up in foamy waves, and blinked back the tears that threatened. "It's a horrible thing, Jeffrey, to watch your culture dying all around you, because no children are born to carry it forward. You can't imagine it."

He was silent, the cursor still. She turned back, searching for something that would make an impact, make him understand how important this was to her. "Telling me that my child must be hearing is like—like telling a black woman that she is only allowed to bear white babies. It's wrong, Jeff. You always believed in freedom of choice, in abolishing discrimination—well, that's exactly what this is. Jeff, please . . ." She trailed off.

He sighed. "Marina, even if I could manage it somehow," he said gently, "and you gave birth to a deaf baby—" Awkwardly he tried to sign to her, touching a finger to lips and ear for "deaf," making a cradling gesture for "baby." Marina swallowed around a sudden lump in her throat, loving him for that effort. But she'd lost track, and had to read the rest off the screen. Her head was beginning to hurt. [—you know they'll never let you keep it. You might have six months before someone noticed, and then they would put the child in a foster home—with hearing people, you can be sure—and you would go to jail. They'd never let you see your son or daughter again, and your culture, as you put it, would still be lost.]

Marina shook her head emphatically. "They'd only do that if they can prove it was done on purpose. And we'll make sure they don't even *suspect*. The only people who know—the only ones who *will* know—are me, Grant, and you. As long as *you* don't say anything, we'll be fine.

"Furthermore, a DNA test won't reveal anything unusual," she continued, "because there won't be any engineered genes involved. Nothing that doesn't come directly from either me or Grant. Besides—what hearing person," she spat the words, "is going to believe I actually *wanted* a deaf child? I'll be appropriately sorrowful and outraged when my baby is diagnosed 'defective.' The whole thing will be put down to a lab mix-up."

He shook his head. [Extremely risky. The media will be climbing all over this, you can be sure—the first child born deaf in America in twenty-five years!]

"Jeff." She looked at him calmly. "You're not going to change my mind. I want this more than anything, and if you won't help me I will find some other way." She paused, hands balling into fists on her thighs. "It *can* be done, I know it can. I just need to know if you're willing to help me." She held his gaze challengingly.



“God, Marina. Do you have any idea of what you’re really asking me to do here? What kind of risks are involved? Any idea at all?” His eyes flicked back and forth between hers, his expression open and pleading.

Marina glanced down, ashamed. [Any idea at all?] The cursor blinked on the interpreter, waiting. Of course, he was in just as much danger from this as she was. A long jail term; his career destroyed. And with nothing but an abstract principle urging him forward. In that moment she realized, with cold certainty, that he would turn her down . . . and more, that she couldn’t blame him. “I know—I know it’s a lot to ask. You don’t owe me this, Jeff, okay? You don’t owe me anything.” Marina stuffed the interpreter back into her shoulder bag and jumped down to the step below. She put a hand lightly on his leg. It was the only time they had touched since the handshake in the restaurant. “Thanks for buying lunch. I’ll return the favor sometime.” She reached up to retrieve the coolpack from his lap.

He held tight to the strap and didn’t let her have it, just stared at her, studying her face. Then he looked off over her left shoulder, eyes unfocused. Tiny lines between his eyebrows came and went and came again. Finally he took a deep breath and closed his eyes. “I’ll do it,” he said, and she thought she must have read it wrong, but he met her eyes then and said it again. “I’ll do it.”

She let go and leaned up against the rock step. He looked off to the right again, out at the water.

[We’ll need to stay away from each other as much as possible. It’s bad enough that the child’s father is a gynecologist, though I’ll admit it makes for a tighter conspiracy. It wouldn’t do for you to suddenly start spending a lot of time with a biogeneticist, too. I’ll have to see you once more, though, to give you the embryos. I think I can get the recomb done this weekend— I’ll do several, in case the first one doesn’t implant. Just hang on to the extra ones. I’ll call you and we can meet for lunch again next week; that shouldn’t be too unusual.]

[Okay, that ought to do it for now. Oh, and a list of ob-gyns that use GeneSys’s labs. Shit.] She glanced up to see him rubbing a hand across his forehead. [I have no idea how I’m going to manage that. There should be a file somewhere—well, I’ll figure something out. I guess I’ll need you to let me know which doctor, and when she takes the cell sample. In fact, get a Friday appointment. That way it’ll be at the lab all weekend, and I’ll have more time. God, I don’t believe I’m doing this.] He got up and dusted the snow off his pants. “Let’s go.”

Marina followed, afraid that anything she said might change his mind. Because of course what she had told him wasn’t true at all. Anyone else she went to would be a complete stranger, and might turn her in before she even got her chance. She shivered a little in the rising wind.

They walked out of the park together, and back up Michigan Avenue past the restaurant. The windows were tinted, making it impossible to see more than vague

shadows inside. When they got to the corner where she would turn toward the train station, Marina stopped.

“Well, I’ll call you.” Jeff’s hand went up along his jaw in a Y shape. Call. Pointing at her. You. “We’ll do lunch, right?” An L at the lips. Lunch. He started away without waiting for her answer, stopped, then turned around and walked back. Reaching out, he gently pried the interpreter from her cold-numbered hand, faced away from her and spoke into it for a moment. Then, with a lopsided, ironic sort of grin, he handed it back to her, turned a second time and walked down the street.

[I think you should know—I’m not really doing this for the principle of it. I’m not sure what to believe about that part right now. I’m doing it because a woman I once loved—maybe still do love—has asked me to, and I can’t seem to bring myself to tell her no.]

Marina stood still and watched him go, trying to think of something to say to that, and finding nothing that would not have made things worse. In less than two blocks she had lost him in the crowd.

As it turned out, she didn’t have lunch with Jeff again after all.

Leaving the apartment for a grocery-store run Tuesday afternoon, she nearly ran into a dark-haired woman whom she had not, of course, heard approaching.

They apologized to each other and the woman began to walk on, then took a second look at the apartment number on the door.

“Would you be Marina”—something. Not her last name, which would have been logical.

Marina blinked. “Yes?”

“Oh, good. I’m a friend of Jeff Langford’s, we work together, and he asked me to come by and give this to you.” She handed Marina the gift-wrapped package she was carrying in one hand.

Marina stared down at the bright blue bow, realizing what this must be, and missed the woman’s next few words.

“—sorry he couldn’t come himself,” she was saying when Marina looked up again, “he’s been really”—something—“at work, you know, it’s terrible what they”—something else, ending in “oo.” Marina picked it up again with “. . . tell you to have a really happy birthday, and he’ll call you later.”

“Uh, thanks.” The woman was beginning to look concerned. It was her birthday, Marina realized; she was supposed to be enthusiastic, not confused. “This is great,” she tried. “I can’t wait to see what it is! Tell Jeff I said thanks. And thank you for bringing it over.”

The woman smiled cheerfully. “Oh, no problem, it was practically on my way home. You have a good birthday, okay?” She walked back down the hall, waving just before she turned the corner.

Marina hit the door lock and stepped back inside, tearing paper as she went. Inside the box was an insulated coolpack, about fist-sized. Inside the coolpack, were six tiny padded vials.

Six embryos. She wondered what happened that had made Jeff nervous enough to forgo a second lunch.

It had been thirteen days since her last period. Grant implanted the first embryo that very evening. They had agreed to try only one at a time, despite the possible delay, because the birth of deaf fraternal twins would be suspicious. Even with modern methods and medications, the chance that a given embryo would implant and survive was only forty percent.

Ten days later, a home blood test confirmed that she was, indeed, pregnant.

The following Wednesday, Marina was at her room terminal accessing a graphics file when the lights began flashing in the short-short-long pattern that meant someone was inquiring at the door. A message appeared across the bottom of her screen: [Visitor for Marina Carmichael: Jivval from Market Gardens . . . Floral Delivery . . . ID CONFIRMED]

Marina stared at this a moment, then rose to answer the door. She tried to think of who might be sending her flowers, and why, and came up blank. No one except Grant knew yet that she was pregnant. Maybe it was a mistake.

She pressed the door panel. A dark-skinned teenage boy stood outside, holding a long white box. He grinned at her, offering a slate for her to sign. She did so, and maneuvered the box through the doorway. The door slid shut behind her.

She took the box into the dining room and laid it on the table. Grant was sitting, eating a sandwich; he looked over with interest.

Marina lifted the lid, revealing blue roses, a dozen long-stemmed ones. A small white envelope lay nestled among the stems. She picked it up, avoiding the thorns, broke the seal with a fingernail, and pulled out the card.

It contained a handwritten list of eight doctors' names, and the word "Friday," underlined twice. The card was unsigned. She handed it to Grant. "Jeff," she told him. Then she shook her head. "Why flowers?" she signed, pointing. "Blue expensive, wow! Why-not E-mail? Why-not phone?"

Grant shrugged. "Maybe he think need careful. Now no," he spelled, "e-l-e-c-t-r-o-n-i-c record of message, if later person authority look-closely. Maybe he think card with flowers not easy notice they, not make suspicious they." He handed the card back to her, and she took it absentmindedly, staring at the blue roses, and hoping, despite herself, that they were more than camouflage.

Since the blood test Marina had asked several of her female friends for ob-gyn recommendations. Three of the eight names on Jeff's list were also on her own.

She began calling, and was able to make a 10:00 A.M. appointment with the third doctor for the following Friday.

She printed out the address, and then checked to be sure none of the other doctors' offices were in the same area. Then she E-mailed Jeff.

Enjoyed our lunch the other day. Could we do it again? I have an appointment Friday morning the 24<sup>th</sup>, near Clark and Division—perhaps we could meet at the Wallflower around noon? Let me know. Love, Marina

Saturday's mail list, when it scrolled up, contained a letter from her friend Jenny in Seattle, several notices she didn't recognize—probably advertisements—and a note from Jeff, which she displayed immediately.

Marina—sorry, but I can't make the lunch date. I've got a big project coming together at work; will probably have to work all next weekend. Some other time, okay? Jeff.

He was avoiding her, she realized. He didn't ever intend to see her again. Well, that was just *fine*, then. She hit the table explosively. She wouldn't chase after him. It would never work with a hearing man anyway. And she'd gotten what she needed. Her hand dropped to her still-flat belly, caressing it gently.

"You sure not-want come party you?" Marina signed with one hand, the other paused just over the door panel.

Grant sighed, running his fingers through his short hair. "Yes, I sure. Very-exhausted. And I promise Paul two-of-us watch movie tonight. Say hello to mother-father, please? I call them next-week."

Marina shrugged and nodded. "C-U-L," she spelled, dropping the "L" forward in the shorthand for "See you later."

She walked the three blocks to the el station deep in thought, not noticing the familiar surroundings at all. She was six weeks' pregnant now, which meant she had only two weeks left in which to change her mind. After that, the pregnancy would be too far along for mifepristone to stop, and the only way out would be to have an illegal surgical abortion, a prospect which frightened her more than going to jail for fetal abuse.

As she climbed the stairs to the platform the old wooden framework began to vibrate. She hurried up the last steps and found a seat on the waiting train.

The party was at Bill and Lianna's house, in Evanston. It was an older house, remodeled but not in a modern style. When Marina pressed the door button she could see the lights begin to flash through the little circular window in the wooden door.

Then Lianna opened the door. "Marina!" she signed, smiling and pulling her in. The short hallway opened to the right into a large room where about fifteen or

sixteen people her age and older sat or stood in small circles. Heads turned to see who had arrived, and several people smiled and waved. Marina could feel a rapid thump through the floor and guessed that someone had music on with the bass turned up high. “I-take your coat,” Lianna offered, and Marina shrugged out of it and handed it to her.

She joined the nearest group of people, which consisted of Bill, Stephan, Nancy, Elisabeth, and Grant’s mother Joanna. “Grant where?” Joanna signed, raising her eyebrows, and Marina relayed Grant’s message. Joanna shook her head. “That boy he say-say-say he call, but none.” Next to her, Bill appeared to be having a political argument with Elisabeth and Stephan, on Marina’s right.

“Busy,” Marina agreed. “Hospital work very-long hours he. I help he remember he.” Elisabeth signed “no-no-no” at Bill. Stephan signed “president,” fingerspelled something quickly—the angle was wrong for Marina—and finished up with an emphatic “plan bullshit.”

Nancy caught her eye. “Discuss-continue same for hour,” she signed, rolling her eyes. “Boring they. You want two-of-us go-away?”

Marina shrugged and followed her across the room. They sat down next to Susan, Julio, and a black man she didn’t know. “Marina, good see-you!” Susan said. Julio waved a hand.

Susan pointed at the stranger. “This L-a-r-r-y, last-name T-u-r-n-e-r.” He smiled at her, signing his name-sign, which was the word “turn” initialized with an L. Marina grinned at the pun. Susan was spelling Marina’s name for Larry.

“Larry live Seattle Washington,” Susan said, turning back to Marina and Nancy.

Marina waved for Larry’s attention. “You know J-e-n-n-y last-name H-a-v-e-l-o-c-k?” she asked.

Larry raised his eyebrows. “Yes, she good-friend me. You know her?”

“We go school together finish. She good-friend.”

Larry nodded. “Deaf small world.”

“Becoming-smaller,” Julio interjected, a sour expression on his face. His hands came together until there was almost no space between them at all. He directed this toward Susan, obviously resuming a conversation interrupted by their arrival. “Soon none Deaf remaining. Genocide.”

Susan shrugged. “Know-that,” she signed, her posture expressing condescension. “Everyone know-that.” Her gesture indicated the whole room. “Doesn’t-matter. Can’t change.”

Larry had turned to Nancy and begun to talk. Marina concentrated until she felt her awareness split, so that she could keep up with both conversations at once. “Film all sign—drama, conversation, party same this,” he was explaining. “Try save all sign for future deaf.” Marina was fascinated by the contrast between his pink palms and his dark skin as his large hands turned.

“But *none* future deaf!” Marina signed at him. “All children born hearing!”

“No change because you—” Julio made a sharp sign, like a turtle pulling its head into its shell. “If we organize group l-o-b-b-y Congress, argue laws culture protect . . .”

Marina stood up abruptly. She’d had this conversation a hundred times before, and she suddenly didn’t want to participate in it again. No one ever did anything about it. Except her. And she wanted to tell them, and couldn’t. “Toilet?” she signed when Nancy glanced up at her.

Nancy pointed toward the kitchen. “Turn right.”

As she passed the refrigerator, Marina noticed a child’s drawing clipped to the front with a magnet. She stopped to look closer. It was a brown animal—a dog or a rabbit, Marina guessed from the ears—sitting in tall grass surrounded by four-petaled flowers. Her own mother had never put anything of Marina’s on the refrigerator, she thought bitterly. Her mother had never encouraged her in art at all, had even forbidden Marina to draw for years. Which didn’t mean that she’d stopped, only that she’d had to hide it. Everything worthwhile she’d ever accomplished had been in direct defiance of her mother.

Lianna came in from the living room carrying two empty glasses, which she set down on the counter.

“Pretty,” Marina signed. “Picture it your daughter draw herself?”

Lianna smiled, flipping her long dark hair behind her shoulder. “Yes, she school draw. She old-eight now.”

“Where she now?”

Lianna pointed upstairs. “She put-in-suitcase clothes she. Go all-night party girl-friend house she.”

As if on cue, Lianna’s daughter ran in from the living room then. “I ready go,” she signed to her mother. Marina was startled, and then felt foolish. She knew Lianna couldn’t speechread very well, and couldn’t vocalize at all, so of course her daughter would have to sign.

“You pack-suitcase finish you?” asked Lianna. “Feed cat finish you?”

The girl nodded vigorously, ponytail bouncing. “I finish, finish.” She signed a name initialized with a C. “Her father drive us.”

“OK,” signed Lianna. “You know number phone?” The girl rolled her eyes and signed the seven-digit number in a blur. “Okay, Mom?” she asked aloud.

Lianna nodded and held out her arms. Her daughter grinned and gave her a hug, then ran out again. Marina watched, caught in a wave of longing. She couldn’t remember her own mother ever hugging her like that.

“Lianna,” she said impulsively, “you think difficult have hearing child?”

Lianna looked thoughtful. “I-don’t-know if hearing child difficult more than Deaf child. Maybe different. All kids difficult. Worry worry worry.” She sighed, staring at the picture. “Long-time-ago I want Deaf baby. But my daughter I-love-her.” She turned back to Marina, looking at her closely. “You pregnant you?” she asked. “For-for you-ask-me g-y-n doctor name, yes?”

Marina hesitated, then nodded.

Lianna smiled and gave her a big hug. When she pulled back, she signed, “Not worry. You will fine. You see.”

For a moment Marina considered telling her the whole story, but she realized that would be foolish, and would only endanger Lianna if something went wrong. So Marina smiled as if reassured, and walked back to the living room with her.

Larry broke away from his conversation with Nancy and came up to admire her earrings. She smiled when he instantly discovered the hidden aspect; it tended to elude hearing people, but Deaf people invariably got it right away. Each earring was a dangling cylinder containing a holographic hand; as the cylinders rotated, the hand changed positions, spelling out a word. The left one spelled d-e-a-f, the right one l-o-v-e. “Appropriate,” signed Larry, his other hand caressing her jaw lightly as he released the earring.

He drew her into talking about her work, and slowly she began to relax and enjoy the party. It was such a relief to be able to communicate without the constant struggle. She missed this feeling of camaraderie and sharing that made even Larry seem like an old friend instead of someone she’d just met. She found herself flirting with him, and realized how long it had been since she’d felt even that comfortable with a man.

She pushed all other thoughts aside. Time to worry about that decision later.

Two weeks went by in an agonizing crawl, and Marina did nothing. Then it was as if a weight had been lifted off of her chest. Somehow, knowing she couldn’t change her mind made her situation easier to deal with. She felt calm and secure and competent.

As far as she knew, no one had ever been accused of deliberately *engineering* a defective child. She didn’t know what the consequences of that would be, and was grimly determined that she would never find out. She had to make it obvious that she was expecting a hearing child.

Marina went shopping. She bought baby clothes, and toys, and a crib—and a little minidisc player to go in her room, which the baby would share until they moved into a larger apartment, and a dozen different albums of children’s songs and lullabies.

Seven months later, Marina gave birth to a baby boy. The doctors checked him over and pronounced him perfectly healthy, and let them both go home the next day.

Marina walked to her bedroom and collapsed gratefully onto the bed. She had foolishly thought that once she’d had the baby, the hard part was over. She hadn’t realized she would be so *exhausted* afterward. And so sore in every muscle she could barely move.

Grant came in behind her with the bassinet, which he placed on the stand beside the bed. He touched her leg to get her attention, but she was too tired to even look at him.

Marina dozed for about half an hour before her wristwatch began to vibrate in response to the baby's cries. Grant came in to make sure she was awake. "Sorry, sweetheart," he signed. "I-know exhausted you. If I can feed baby from"—he pointed to his chest, grinning a little—"I change-places-with-you."

"I wish," Marina signed, yawning. She sat up and rearranged her clothes to expose a breast.

Grant grimaced ironically. "But you lucky. You not must hear sweet baby scream he." He picked the baby up and handed him to Marina, who smiled and settled him in the crook of her arm. He hunted for the nipple and she positioned it for him, pressing the breast back so he could breathe.

The truth was, she almost regretted not being able to hear him. She was completely in love. He fit so perfectly into her arm. She loved the weight of him there against her chest, the baby-smell of him. He was beautiful, he was perfect. The pull she felt as he nursed satisfied something deep inside her. With a start, she realized she was humming to him. She could feel the thrumming deep in her chest.

She glanced up, and discovered that Grant had left the room. Almost guiltily, she began humming again. The baby closed his eyes and suckled sweetly.

The next afternoon brought an unexpected visitor. Marina happened to be up getting a glass of orange juice when the lights began flashing, short-short-long. She walked to the front door and pushed a button on the panel. Red LED words appeared on the tiny screen: [Visitor for Marina Carmichael: Jeffrey Langford . . . ID CONFIRMED]

She blinked, surprised, then opened the door. Jeff smiled awkwardly. "Hi! Come on in," she said. Grant came up as he did so. "Grant, this is Jeff Langford."

"Hi," Grant said aloud. He extended a hand, and the two men shook. Marina tugged at Jeff's other arm. "Come on," she urged, "come see the baby." She led him back to her room, where the baby was nestled in the wicker bassinet next to her bed. She pulled the interpreter out of the bag she'd brought from the hospital and thumbed it on.

[He's beautiful,] Jeff said. He looked concerned, though, and Marina touched his arm.

"He's fine," she said. "We're both fine."

He nodded, but the worried look didn't dissipate. "What's his name?" he asked.

"I don't know, yet." She smiled. "We wanted to get to know him first, before we picked out a permanent name."

Jeff nodded. Marina gazed down at the baby. She touched one tiny curled hand, marveling at its softness.



Jeff touched her arm to get her attention. [You should talk to him, you know. Babies respond to the sound of their mothers' voices.] She looked up in time to catch his wistful smile. "And I always told you you had a beautiful voice."

She gave a small laugh, even though she didn't think the joke was very funny. Jeff didn't smile at all, and suddenly the expression on his face registered. It was more than just concern, it was . . . guilt. He wouldn't meet her eyes. Dread settled in the pit of her stomach.

"What," she said. When he didn't reply, she said it again, loud enough that she could feel the rumble in her chest. "Jeff, what!"

He looked away, then back, defiantly. "He's not deaf, Marina. I didn't do it."

Marina thought she must have misunderstood, but the words were there on her screen, in stark and terrible confirmation. She turned and stared at the sleeping baby. Hearing. My child is hearing. It didn't mean anything to her yet.

"Why." It was all she could think of to say. But before he could answer, the rest exploded from her in a rush. "I thought you understood, how important it was, you said— Oh! You never told me! Nine-months pregnant I, you-tell-me nothing, all-time baby hearing!" She began to cry. "Why? Why you do this? Why not you-tell-me beginning 'no, can't help-you I'?"

He was staring at her, confused, and she realized that she had stopped vocalizing and was only signing, hands jerking with grief and anger. She forced herself to slow down and speak.

"You had no right to make that decision for me. You tricked me into bearing a child I did not want. This was *my* baby, *my* choice, and if you didn't want to take the risk, you could have just told me. You offered to help me and then you chose to back out and save your own skin, and didn't even have the guts to tell me. Or did you *want* to see me suffer? Acting out some little revenge fantasy because I dumped you five years ago? How could you be so hateful?"

He shook his head, pleading. "I didn't do it to save my own skin, whatever you might think. And I don't want to see you hurt." He reached out toward her arm and she jerked it away. His hand dropped awkwardly. [I *wanted* to help you, Marina. I tried, but I just couldn't. You weren't only making a choice for yourself, don't you understand—you were making one for that baby, too, one that he would have to live with all his life!]

"Oh, so you think you're playing the great hero," she sneered, "rescuing this little innocent child from the terrible handicap his mother wished to impose upon him?" Her wristband began to vibrate, but she ignored it.

[No, I *don't* think that deafness has to be a handicap. But it was different for you, Marina. You had the chance to make friends with people like yourself, your own age. But the last deaf child was born twenty-five years ago! You know how conformist kids are; they all want to wear the same brand of jeans, for god's sake. Do you really think he wouldn't resent being the only one who couldn't hear? Did

you ever think, what's to stop him from getting a cochlear implant the moment he's old enough to understand he has that choice?]

That shook her, and she didn't say anything. She hadn't thought of that at all, that her son might rebel and *choose* to be hearing. The same way, as a teenager, she'd finally stopped trying to please her mother and embraced the Deaf world. Suddenly she thought of Lianna's daughter, who had gone off to a hearing friend's house rather than stay with the adults at the Deaf party. And Lianna had let her. And the girl had signed to her mother, and hugged her before she went.

"Marina, please try to understand." He gestured toward the bassinet. "He would have been so terribly, terribly alone."

"He would have had me." And behind that, the other thought, the she didn't say: and I would have him. The way she'd never really had anyone—not Jeff, not even dear Grant, or any of her other friends or lovers down the years, even the Deaf ones. Not her own mother.

She stared down at the child, his face mottled red and his mouth open in a scream. He would grow up part of the hearing world, and she would never understand him. They would be separate forever. All the dreams she had, all the things she had wanted to share with her child, all of them crumbled into dust. He would be ashamed of her, his deaf mother, the way her mother had been ashamed of her deaf daughter.

Jeff made a small motion. She had forgotten he was there, but now she looked up, hatefully. "Get out. Get the fuck out and don't ever come near me again." She threw the interpreter at the bed.

He stared sorrowfully at her for a moment, and then started for the door. In the doorway he turned around again, and waited until she gave in and glared up at him. He spoke slowly and carefully, making sure she had time to speechread. "If you love him, Marina, it won't matter that he can hear. He will learn your language and your culture because it is yours and he loves you." Then he was gone, and she collapsed onto the bed, curled up, and began to sob. Her watch was still vibrating, and she pulled it off and flung it across the room.

Sometime later, Grant came in. He didn't ask why she had been crying, so she assumed Jeff must have told him. She was grateful not to have to explain. He didn't say anything, just sat on the side of the bed and stroked her hair off her forehead.

"You know," he said after a while, speaking and signing together, "when scientists prove gay g-e-n-e-t-i-c finish, gay almost become class" —he paused, "d-e-f-e-c-t," he spelled, "same deaf. Only because many many of us . . ." He looked off for a moment, then spoke in English only. "And still the political climate could reverse again at any time." He turned back to her, taking her hands in his. "I understand what you are losing, Marina, what you fear. And the battle you must fight.

"But do it yourself, love. Not through your child. Your son doesn't deserve your love any less just because he is different from you." He leaned forward and kissed

her gently on the cheek. “You think about,” he signed. “Now, I believe you need chocolate milk s-h-a-k-e. Good?”

Marina wiped tears off her cheek and nodded. Grant smiled. “B-right-B,” he signed.

After he left, she leaned over and looked at her son, sleeping now on his stomach in the bassinet. Because he is different from me, she thought.

She thought about her own mother, who must have wanted so much for her daughter to be like herself. How frustrating my deafness must have been for her, Marina realized suddenly. A fundamental difference that permeated every aspect of her life, completely alien and . . . frightening. Abruptly her perspective shifted, and Marina could see her mother’s actions as born, not of resentment or hatred, but of confusion and fear. It didn’t make them any better, but at least she understood, a little.

She brushed the baby’s thin down of hair with her fingertips. In a moment of brutal self-honesty, Marina acknowledged that above anything else, her son had been an act of defiance toward her mother, who had shamed her every day of her life for not being a “normal” child. And if she resented her own son for not being Deaf, what was the difference?

She reached into the bassinet and picked up the baby. He stirred and yawned, his tiny mouth open wide, and nuzzled sweetly against her neck. She thought of Lianna and her daughter, holding each other. Marina rested her cheek on the top of the baby’s soft head and made him a silent promise.

*I will not make the mistake my mother did, she told him. I will not try to mold you selfishly in my own image. No matter how hard it is. I will let you grow to be your own person, and take joy in that.* She squeezed her eyes shut against the pain expanding in her chest, and tears tracked across her nose, dampening the baby’s fine hair. *Even if it means you grow away from me.*

When she looked up again her gaze fell on the disc player, dusty on its table in the corner by the crib. She walked over to it and flipped through the rack of minidisks, pulling one out. It was still in its ricepaper wrapper, and she tore at it one-handed, holding the baby against her chest, reluctant to put him down even for a minute. Afraid that this tenuous bond might break. She put the disc in the tray and pushed the play button.

The quality of the silence in the room did not change at all. The afternoon sunlight streamed gold through the thin ivory curtains as Marina held her son in both arms and danced to her own internal rhythm.