

This is the second time my wife's belly has swelled with new life. The second time she has used her body to bring my child into the world.

Yet, this is the first time I've seen it in person. The first time I've kissed her stomach, and had a heel or elbow push back. It's nothing short of a miracle.

I missed it all before, the first time around. Circumstances aren't what they used to be, thank God.

I'm ready. My bag is packed. Compared to Aubrey's bag, mine is tiny. She has toiletries, a robe, and a going home outfit for our baby boy. She also has a special nursing bra, tubes of cream, and a breast pump. When I'd asked what the pump was all about, she said she wanted to be prepared in case the baby doesn't latch. I asked what 'latch' means in this context. Her answer necessitated follow-up questions.

All this led me to the not-at-all shocking conclusion that my wife is prepared for any and all outcomes. And that she is quite possibly the best mom in the world. Which I already knew.

I've just returned from taking Claire to school, and the house is still quiet. Aubrey doesn't usually sleep this late, but the baby has her up going to the bathroom many times a night.

I handle the breakfast dishes and peek at Aubrey on my way down the hall. She's bleary-eyed, and trying to hoist herself up to sitting.

I hurry over and give her my arm. She uses it to pull herself upright, then looks up at me.

"Uggg," she groans, mouth closed. "They tell me there's only one baby in here, but it doesn't feel like it." She rubs her stomach. "Or look like it."

I brush a hand over her cheek, pushing aside her dark hair. "Any day now."

“Any day now,” she echoes, gripping my arm again and using me to help her stand. This has been our routine for the past three weeks, when her stomach went from basketball to watermelon.

She smiles when she’s on her own two feet, and rewards my assistance with a kiss. “You’re the best, Doctor Cowboy.”

“Careful there,” I say, when her kiss lingers. “You know how we ended up in this situation.”

She snorts, and moves on to the bathroom. “I also know I’ve been told a way to try and get out of this situation.” She throws me a look over her shoulder and starts to pull the strap of her nightgown down her arm.

A very important part of my anatomy awakens.

I mean...it wouldn’t be a bad way to spend a morning. We have nothing but time right now, because I took two weeks off while we wait for our boy to arrive.

My eyebrows lift. “Finish up in there, and then—”

Aubrey’s eyes widen. Her gaze drops to her feet. “I think my water broke?”

A trickle of water runs down the inside of her leg. Then another, and another, and Aubrey grabs a towel from the counter and tosses it between her feet.

At first I’m frozen, but then I slingshot into action. I grab my bag, then Aubrey’s, and work my phone from my back pocket while dialing John. My heart hammers in my chest.

“John,” I bark when he answers. “It’s time.” I gulp. “It’s time,” I say again, my voice louder.

“Calm down, Isaac.” John’s voice remains at a low pitch. “I’ve got it covered. You get Aubrey to the hospital. I’ll pick up Claire from school and bring her to meet you.”

I hang up and look at Aubrey. She has turned around, still standing over the towel, and her hands are clasped in front of her mouth. Tears shine in her eyes.

“What’s wrong?” I rush to her, overnight bags bouncing against me.

“Nothing is wrong.” She wipes her eyes. “Everything is right. You’re here this time.”

I understood what I missed with Claire, but I didn’t *know*. Not until I saw Sam.

He’s on my chest, his tiny limbs tucked into a soft blanket. Aubrey’s concerns about him not latching disappeared quickly. She has already fed him once, and I held back my emotion. I made the requisite “like father, like son” joke, and the nurse’s expression told me I’m not the first man to have said that.

Sam’s lips move, his eyes open, then he blinks and falls back to sleep. I don’t think he even really woke up.

There isn’t much that can take away from the contented warmth in my chest right now, but there’s a twinge of pain knowing I didn’t get to do this with my daughter. I’ll always regret that, but sometimes circumstances are what they are, and all the wishing in the world can’t change them.

Aubrey watches me hold our son. Normally my wife has it all together. She feels deeply, but she doesn't show it easily. Except today. She's been crying consistently since Sam sailed into the world.

I read every book I could get my hands on about pregnancy and postpartum, so I expected the big emotions to accompany the changes in hormones. These tears are not a part of that. These tears have been held back for years, and maybe would've never been shed had we not decided to have another child.

My hands are full holding our son, so I send a kiss sound in Aubrey's direction. She attempts a smile and says, "I'm watching you, and all I can think is that you and Claire didn't get to do that."

"Aubrey," I say, my voice quiet. "You know better than anybody we can't change the past."

"Right," she nods. "You're right."

"I love you," I tell her. It's the third time I've said it in the last hour. The first was when I watched her perform the superhuman act of pushing another human from her body, and the second was when she looked down at Sam like her entire life had been distilled into that single, precious moment.

"I love you, Isaac." Aubrey opens her mouth to say more, but there's a high-pitched voice in the hall that stops her. She looks tenderly at Sam. "I hope he's ready to meet his sister. She's been ready for a while."

Claire drew a countdown to Aubrey's due date, and she has been diligently checking each box at bedtime every night. She helped wash and fold Sam's clothes in preparation for his arrival, and pledged her help changing dirty diapers. We'll see about the second one.

"In here, Claire," I hear John say.

The door flies open at the same time John warns, "Remember to be quiet."

Claire rushes in, processes her grandpa's words a few seconds too late, and then makes a show of tiptoeing. Her smile is so big her gums are on display.

God, I love my daughter.

Claire hugs her mother first, and Aubrey kisses the side of her head. I nod Claire over, and she rounds the bed, approaching me and Sam with pursed lips and wide eyes.

"Hi, Sam," Claire whispers, hands at her mouth in her astonishment. To me, she says, "He's tiny."

Sam yawns and attempts to move his head as much as he can manage. "Would you like to hold him?" I ask Claire.

"Yes," she whisper-yells, hands vibrating with excitement. She lifts herself into the second chair in the room and sits, arms folded so they look like scoops.

I stand, and transfer Sam into Claire's arms. I take an extra moment to adjust his head into the crook of her elbow.

"Ooohhhh," she says, a long string of excitement. "He's heavier than my hippo."

Claire used a large stuffed hippo to practice holding a baby. Aubrey showed her how to place her arms, and support the baby's head and neck.

Taking a step back, I glance at Aubrey and John. John is standing beside Aubrey, and I see a glint of unshed tears in his eyes. The man is tough like leather, but he turns to a marshmallow when it comes to his daughter and grandkid. *Grandkids*.

Aubrey smiles at the sight of Claire holding her baby brother. And me? My heart swells to the point I can't believe it can still be housed in my chest.

My wife.

My daughter. My son.

It's everything I asked for.

John steps aside, leaving a space for me beside Aubrey. I go to her, and he goes to Claire, bending down to get closer to his grandson.

Aubrey looks up at me. She is free of make-up, her hair twisted into a messy bun on top of her head. Exhaustion pulls at the corners of her eyes. She's never looked more beautiful.

"Thanks for Sam," I whisper. I push back a stray hair with my thumb.

"I had some help," she reminds me, her mouth curving into a soft smile.

It had taken us seven months of trying. Aubrey worried about that, given how all this started. I didn't worry. I knew it would happen. I felt it, somewhere down deep, another soul who belonged to us. *Sam*.

I press a kiss to my wife's lips, quiet but lingering. This woman. She didn't make it easy, but I didn't care. Good things aren't just worth the wait, they're worth the hard work.

Aubrey isn't just good, she's incredible.

I stare at my wife, then shift my attention to our children. Claire grins down at Sam's closed eyes.

I couldn't have known a one-hour choice made years ago would give me this life.

Now I'm forever grateful to the series of wrong decisions that were actually right.