

“Peter’s gone,” Ricardo said.

Just in sight of the department store’s Expectant Mothers section, I’d slouched into the antagonistically-named “boyfriend couch” and tried to ballpark how many people were pregnant at any given time when the phone rang. Ricardo sounded anxious and in a hurry, which grated against my current intentions to completely zone out until I was allowed to leave.

“Where’d he go this time?” I asked, scarcely registering who he was talking about.

“No, he’s gone, like he left. Left his family, gone. Like we can’t find him, gone. His wife called me looking for him. I didn’t know where he was. She said he called from the airport saying he had to get away and he’d tell her more later. Then nothing. He left. He’s gone.”

As Ricardo talked, I watched my girlfriend walk pregnant belly first to the dressing room, passing between two mannequins dressed in crop tops. Ready for summer.

I turned toward the exit and leaned into whatever Ricardo was talking about to avoid the anxious gut shot I sometimes got when faced with just how pregnant Isabel had become.

“He needed to get away? From what?”

I had seen enough of Peter’s wife and kids on social media to feel intimately connected with them—and equally pissed by the thought of Peter abandoning them. His family was beautiful, an inspiration for guys like me with one on the way. Through my phone screen’s filters and buffed edges, they seemed infinitely happy, surrounded by a life of barbecues and cute mishaps and love. Ricardo and I shared a moment of silence, thinking about our old friend and returned to worry about him. *Why would he leave?*

“What do you think is going on? Why would he do this? How could he abandon those kids?” I felt a sense of betrayal, of anger bubbling while my shock was lifting.

“I’m not sure. He was always kind of cold.”

Ricardo was right. Peter was the most chill guy we’d ever known, but he was also chilly, constantly venturing in and out of our lives without notice. Each of Peter’s trips was taken alone, all months at a time, with a steely disregard for friendships, relationships, prior commitments, and milestones. He’d missed the births and birthdays of every one of Ricardo’s kids. Isabel and I hadn’t yet heard back on his invitation to our Gender Reveal party—which was not my idea, so it didn’t bother me much.

Then he’d blast back into your life with a force, stacking days of hanging after weeks without hearing from him. It was like he never left and never wanted to leave. He’d return from some crazy corner of the Earth and land on my couch with a story to tell. Jail time in India. Scammers in Venezuela. Near death on the beach in Thailand.

“C’mon, we can’t leave now!” would lead to 9 AM outings in Brooklyn and bleed into Sunday brunch, ending in a Monday goodbye. I’d usually need to take the day off to recover. “I don’t know what to say. I haven’t heard from him either. Let me know if you hear anything else,” I said.

After purchasing whatever she’d tried on, Isabel finally emerged, a bulging bag on her arm. With each visit to the different maternity departments, her pregnancy became more of a reality, one that was straining her back and churning my stomach.

It was normal, I thought, to be nervous about such a thing.

“Hey, beautiful.” I got up to grab her bag.

“Peter went missing. . .kind of,” I fumbled after half an hour thinking what to say.

We were driving down the same parkway Peter had driven in the opposite direction when he moved out to Long Island to live next to his newly-minted in-laws. I had been forced to accept that he had settled down and was ready for it. I figured he’d had enough of being single, the months-long vacations, starting and stopping his life, changing careers. The chilliest guy I knew was ready to chill differently now. Domesticated chill.

“What does that mean?” Isabel said.

“He’s gone. Left his wife and kids.”

When Peter moved to Long Island, I had already settled into my post-mid-twenties life, bought a one-bedroom deep in Brooklyn with my savings (and some family money), dove into a serious relationship with Isabel, and spent more time at the office than the bar. Peter insisted his move to Long Island wouldn’t change anything. He’d be “back in the city every weekend to party,” but that didn’t happen. I rarely saw him in person, following his life only on Instagram like I followed those of all my friends who moved away for a backyard and more space.

“Left them where? Like left them for good?” Isabel said.

“I think so. I’m not sure. I’m worried about him.”

More upset than I imagined, she asked, “How are his wife and kids? Are they alright?”

Recently, I saw him only on special occasions: the baptisms of his three children, each of their first birthdays, and the obligatory surprise party for him or his wife. He came out to the city unpredictably, missing my birthday parties occasionally but making a Fantasy Football draft or a going away party for a friend. It was tough to get out. I knew that. So we all settled into this new, grown-up reality.

“How are they making money? Does she work?” I couldn’t tell who she was more annoyed with, me or Peter.

“I’m not sure. I don’t think I have her number. They—she lives next door to her parents, so she—”

“Jesus, Frankie.” Isabel grabbed her phone and called Peter’s wife. I guess she had her number saved.

“He just left. I don’t know what to say. At first, I thought he needed a little time, so I didn’t make a stink. Now, I’m assuming he’s gone for good.” Two months after he left, Peter’s wife seemed resigned but still angry. Somehow, this had become Isabel’s concern, and I was relegated to the corner in trouble for not acting sooner, listening over speakerphone.

“I don’t get it. How could he do that to you and the kids? It seemed like everything was going great.” Isabel paced the room as she spoke.

“I thought it was. We had arguments, of course. Raising three kids is tough. He complained about things. We both did. Dance rehearsals, daycare pickups, not going out as much. Our lives had changed. I thought he understood that. Obviously didn’t expect this.” She chuckled, unable to laugh fully.

“There must be something wrong. Is he running from something more—dangerous? Did he do something bad?” Isabel asked, grasping at some kind of story that made more sense. “I sure hope not.”

“Do you know how to reach him? Do you know where he is?”

“He sent a postcard to the kids from Medellín. That’s all I know,” she said. “Fuck him is where I’m at.”

That night, I couldn’t sleep. I pictured Peter in a surf town: tanned, in swim trunks, sandy but sad. The dream was not particularly dark, but I was upset for him. Something had to be wrong. I woke up determined to find him and yank him back to his life, to reality. He needed to be saved. I was going to save him.

I bought a budget ticket to Medellín, a place I’d only heard about on TV, usually a show with many guns and bullets. Everyone I asked, Ricardo included, told me it was super nice this time of year.

How do you find someone without a cell phone? I felt like a cowboy in an old Western, one where a bandit with his face painted on a poster was wanted for robbing a train, and some John Wayne-type had to ask around to find him and bring him to justice. I was going to be that John Wayne guy. It was exciting. I told my boss there was a family emergency— “A family member went missing”— and asked for three weeks off. They gave me two but said I should be available remotely for emergencies. I obliged. Isabel was harder to convince.

“What are *you* going to do? Can’t you call someone else to do it? The cops? A private investigator? Something tells me there is someone better for the job.” Isabel was insulting my newfound cowboy confidence.

“He’s my best friend. No one cares about him. I think he’s having some kind of crisis. I have to do *something*.”

“I didn’t know he was your best friend. Maybe you should be helping his family. Not the shithead that abandoned him.”

“He is my best friend! Everyone is already worried about his family, as they should be. No one is trying to help him. So, I’ve got to.”

Resting a hand on her belly, “What about *your* family?”

“I’ll be back with my family in a week or two once I bring my friend home.”

“You two’ll be on the beach in some God-forsaken town with a cold beer while I’m at home like a beached whale. Maybe I’ll run off somewhere, too.”

I laughed and kissed her forehead. She was kidding. I was sure.

“Have you seen my swim trunks? Just in case.”

The mountains surrounding the city closed in on me as I gawked at the sparkling skyscrapers ringed by colorfully painted houses in Medellín. I fought a brief unease of landing in what everyone said was a “third-world country.”

Isabel had snickered when she told me, “It used to be the murder capital of the world, you know. I hope he really is your best friend?”

I admired myself even more for trying to save my friend from what might be a dangerous place. She was convinced I had some ulterior motive for my rescue mission, that I wasn’t actually such good friends with Peter, or I just wanted to get away. *What did she know?* I thought but never said. She’d only met Peter a few times and didn’t yet understand our bond and

how worthy saving him, and it was. *What did she know?*

I had only one clue: the postcard Peter sent to his wife from Medellín as his final goodbye was stamped with the logo of a hostel downtown, *Hostal Paraíso*. I figured he had purchased the postcard from the Hostel where he was staying. In preparation for my mission, I broke out my college notebooks and studied the Spanish I'd learned over a decade ago. Like riding a bike. As I thought about what I might say in my non-native tongue (*How do you say 'Blonde' again?*), I was doused in the chilly unease that maybe I wasn't the right man for the job. Ricardo's parents were from Mexico. He spoke the language fluently, but he hadn't volunteered. I had. So it was up to me.

I dropped my bags off in the room at my Airbnb.

"Do you need any recommendations on sights around town?" the host, a teacher from New Jersey, said.

"No, I think I'm alright. I'm not here as a tourist. I'm on a mission," I replied as confidently as I could muster.

Sunglasses on, I exited the second-floor apartment, emboldened by my own words. I felt like an old detective in a new world, armed with one clue and my notes from Mr. Gallego's Spanish II class in college. Ready to find my friend. Ready for anything.

"Hola, ¿cómo estás?" I squeaked as I entered the hostel.

"Hey, how's it hangin'?" the host replied. "My name is Lalo. How can I help?" He sounded more Southern California surfer than polite Spanish-speaking concierge. I wasn't ready for that. His fluency with my native tongue threw me off. I mourned the hours wasted studying my Spanish notes and memorizing my lines. I couldn't reply.

"You alright?" he followed up after a moment.

"Yeah. . .uh. . . Thanks, Lalo. I'm good. I'm looking for someone."

"Nice. Well, I can probably help. Who are you looking for?"

"His name is Peter Barnum. He's about this height, blonde, short hair." I fumbled in my pocket, pulled out my phone, poked at it a second, and held it out to him. "Here's a picture."

He seemed concerned. His surfer inflections disappeared and turned corporate. "Yes, sir, I remember this client well. He was asked to leave following multiple infractions of hostel policy."

"Infractions? Like what?"

"I can't speak to the specifics. Are you a family member?"

"Well. . .I—" A twitch in his eye signaled he wanted me to say yes. "Yes, I am. We're very worried about my brother."

"I can't say where he is specifically. I don't know. I gave him a list of other places he could stay when we escorted him out of the building. It's company policy we assist our clients in finding new places to stay so they do not regret visiting beautiful Medellín. Sometimes, the nightlife here just gets the best of some folks."

Lalo handed me a piece of paper with a list of local hostels. "He's at one of these places?" I asked.

“I can't be certain, sir, but I would assume so.” A pause. “Can I help you with anything else?”

Lalo seemed to be bending the rules because he was afraid for Peter. He gave me more information than he should have for some reason. That couldn't be good.

Leaving the hostel, my worst but very plausible nightmare came true. My single clue had not panned out. On second thought, wasn't this just how it worked in detective movies? One clue leads to another, and just when you are ready to lose hope—BAM—you've solved it. I was on a detective mission, after all. I knew it was going to be tough. Something in Lalo's face made me worried for Peter. I had a lead. I needed to follow it.

On my way to the first hostel on the list, a man playing “Brown Eyed Girl” with a Spanish accent distracted me. I dropped an uncertain amount of Colombian Pesos in his bucket and looked around. Everywhere I looked, tourists with fanny packs and 55-liter backpacks, phones unholstered for directions or selfies dotted my view. The dollar was inflated in the US, meaning there was a boon to be had here in South America. Australians, an ever-present group of tourists anywhere you go, donned sunglasses and flip-flops, drinking beers on the street and speaking in their distinctive drawl. I couldn't help but take a breath and admire how my unfortunate trip had landed me amongst a group of younger, cooler people.

I decided to stop at a café. If Peter were in Medellín, he'd be there after a quick cup of a Colombian specialty. Sitting on a patio drinking coffee, I heard a few Americans chatting behind me. One was from California.

“You guys here from Cali?” I said, unsure why I called it 'Cali' all of a sudden.

“Yeah, I'm from Ventura. He's from Palo Alto. You?” Ventura spoke past me as he talked. He was in his early 20s and uninterested in platonic male friendship.

“I'm in from New York. Where's Ventura?”

“You're not from California? It's north of LA.” Ventura seemed annoyed. His short, curt sentences made my imposition in their afternoon all the more obvious. Palo Alto continued swiping his phone as if he were flicking peanuts across the room.

“No, I just noticed you were American, so I asked. What brings you to Medellín?”

“We're on break from school. Wanted to get away and see another country.”

“Can I join you?” I asked as I got up to sit in an empty chair at their table. Detectives were direct when they were on a mission. They moved their two-liter, ski resort sticker-riddled, too-big-to-wrap-your-hand-around water bottles to make room. “What's good to do around here? I just got in.”

“We were grabbing coffee before heading back to the room. We're pretty beat from last night.” Palo Alto never looked up.

“Nice. Where are you staying?”

“Casa Bonita.” Palo Alto looked up from his phone to glare at his friend for freely offering their information. I remembered that name from Lalo's list. A clue! Maybe these guys had seen Peter.

“I'm looking for someone. I'm curious if he might have been staying there.”

“Are you a cop or something?” Palo Alto interjected, locking his phone with a digital *click* and setting it aside. He had freckles, and his hair was cut into bangs that sliced his forehead in half horizontally. A single earring dangled from his right ear.

“Nah, man,” I said, trying to come off relaxed but sounding more uptight. “My friend moved down here, but I’m not exactly sure where. Just trying to make sure he’s alright. Here’s his picture.”

“That’s Petey!” Ventura said. Palo Alto glared at him again.

“Petey? I mean, yeah, his name is Peter. Have you seen him? How do you know him?”

“Oh yeah, he’s the man. We partied for like a week straight, from sunup to sundown. Until he got kicked out of the hostel.”

The first people I meet know him? I was starting to think I was pretty good at this detective work.

“Do you know why he got kicked out of *Paraíso*? They wouldn’t tell me.”

“*Paraíso*? No, he got kicked out of *Casa Bonita*.” Ventura’s confusion mixed with mine and made us all the more uncomfortable. Palo Alto looked around to ask for the check.

“What for?” I asked.

“Some of the girls he was bringing back were. . .unwelcome.”

“That’s enough. We don’t know this guy. Fuck off, dude.” Palo Alto got up to leave.

“No worries,” I said, very worried that my only lead was about to walk out the door. “Do you know where he went next?”

“Check *La Sirena Gorda*. He was always there. Knew everyone. Maybe they can help.”

I arrived at *La Sirena Gorda* and stared up at the biggest set of tits I’d ever seen. I’d have been more excited, but they were connected to an even larger fishtail that swooped down to the top of the bar’s door. While looking up at this fine set of yabos, I figured out that ‘Sirena Gorda’ meant ‘Fat Mermaid.’ Learning Spanish!

An equally large man with less great tits greeted me at the door. He patted me down in search of a weapon, an action I found strange mid-afternoon, and waved me through. Inside, the sheer darkness fried my eyes. I fumbled for a seat at the bar while the inverse sun spots faded, and inky black was replaced with a soft, incandescent light.

This bartender was fully American.

“Hey baby,” she said, spinning a cocktail napkin in front of me. “What can I get ya?”

“I’d take a *cerveza... mucho frío*,” I said, figuring it would be funny to highlight that we both spoke English by speaking bad Spanish. She didn’t seem to like that.

“Which one?” She looked away while speaking to me, just like Ventura had.

“*Águila* is fine.”

She set the drink down and walked away. If anyone here knew Petey—Peter—it was her. I knew I needed to talk to her, but I’d let her cool down a bit.

I couldn’t help thinking that everyone here, all these digital nomads, were running from something horrible. They were in a

beautiful place, “the land of eternal Spring,” as some travel websites called it, but they didn’t seem as happy as I would be here. They were working with unexcited stares on their faces or drinking cheap drinks in a cheap, dark bar. Where was the excitement? Where was the adventure? I woke that morning afresh, ready to do some detective work, meet people, and explore. I sensed the entirety of my trip would be like that. I couldn’t wake up early enough or go to sleep late enough. It had been a long time since I’d felt this way.

It made sense that Peter would find this bar appealing; this was precisely the kind of place he loved. Rundown yet hip. Divey but cool. A mix of salty drunks and young travelers. It even had a pool table, though it had no pockets.

When Peter lived in the city, I’d meet him some Thursdays at his favorite bar in the East Village, a place called Holiday Bar that was as dark and damp as *La Sirena Gorda*. Once, he was grading papers on the bar top, waiting for a woman to ask him about his work. As a 9th-grade English teacher, this was a proven method of seduction. When I sat next to him, no one had yet taken the bait, but it didn’t take long before he was turned completely away from me, entirely focused on a younger blonde spouting off about her work in fashion as he talked about how much he “loved the kids.” I finished my drink and left unnoticed.

When I could get the bartender’s attention again, after the burn of my lousy joke had worn off, I asked her about Peter.

“Petey?! Yeah, I know him. Used to be in here every day, more or less. I heard he had some trouble where he was staying. We were getting kind of worried about him.”

A patron to my left butted in, “I saw him the other day. Told me he was off to the coast. Was complaining about the neo-liberal police state here in the city. Kept having to move hostels.”

“Jesus, *the coast*? Did he tell you where he might be headed?”

“I told him about a buddy in Palomino named Domingo. Interesting guy. Runs a hostel on the beach.”

The windy bus trip to Palomino tied my stomach in knots. I couldn’t even eat the complimentary donut that came free with the trip, but at less than \$20, it was the only choice. I was running low on the little money I’d set aside for what Isabel called my “adventure.” She was explicit when she said she wouldn’t contribute, no matter how brave and sincere my intentions were. I was on my own, a thought that made me swell with pride.

A sour feeling, similar to the one I’d felt as I landed in Medellín, circled my stomach as I pulled into Palomino. It wasn’t the coastal paradise sprinkled with all-inclusive resorts and *Señor Frogs* restaurants I’d expected. The dirt streets had turned to mud after the recent rain, and the humidity invaded my body immediately like a storming army with scorched earth orders. My glasses fogged up.

Domingo was of South Asian descent. I asked him how he got here, and he said he’d made a ton of money as a banker in London and got bored. He decided to get into the hostel business, so he bought one. He made up the name because no one could easily pronounce Dhruv. Spending five minutes with him, he was clearly interested in more than just the business prospects of owning a hostel. Every so often, Domingo would unscrew the vial attached to his key chain and pop a small amount of white powder into his nose with a big sniff.

We sat at Domingo’s Paradise Café, the coffee shop on the ground floor of Domingo’s Paradise Hostel. The crew was in the middle of turning it into Domingo’s Paradise Bar for the evening. He was well-known in town. Though I saw few actual patrons, many people came to our table, offering him different products, some more illicit than others, or some polite greeting. Despite what I considered his average looks, he was strangely popular with the ladies. I admired him. He was running from classic success, money that flowed in through a fat salary and bonuses, to a more hectic lifestyle, clearly

brushing up against illegality or at least immorality and pushing on. I could feel Peter's presence hanging out with Domingo.

"A couple of *cervezas*, Fernanda, please," he said with a hungry smile, capping the recently used vial on his keys.

"A friend of mine in Medellín told me you might know my friend Peter."

Fernanda arrived with our beers, freezing cold and wrapped in napkins.

"Yeah I know Peter. You came all this way without knowing if he was here? You could have called."

"His phone is off."

"I mean the hostel. You could have called the hostel."

I had thought of that. I rationalized *not* calling ahead so as not to scare off Peter. I also heard Palomino was beautiful, and I wasn't sure I'd ever have a chance to go again. "Do you know where he is?"

"Petey? Yeah, he's been helping me out around the property. He went to grab some supplies, but he should be back soon. You should relax, man. You're in paradise! Beer's on me. Go to the beach. You looking for company?"

I didn't want to hang with Domingo. "No, I'll just hang out until Peter gets back."

After six beers, my socks and shoes removed so I could bury my toes in the sand, I saw Peter—or Petey—come down the road. He was in swim trunks and flip-flops, and his hair had grown longer than I'd ever seen it, falling around the tops of his ears. I could see the tan around his sunglasses from across the bar. A hot girl in a tiny bikini on his arm. His eyes locked on mine, and he stopped like he'd seen the cops, almost turning to run the other way. Though I eventually expected to see him, I froze too, mouth agape. After a long, pregnant moment, the girl asked him something in Spanish. He kissed her cheek and motioned her away.

Moving toward me, he said, "Frankie? That can't be Frankie, can it?"

I fumbled to set my beer down, knocking over the plastic chair as I got up. "It is, man. How are you? You okay?"

He motioned to Fernanda to bring us a fresh round, joking with her in Spanish. He seemed normal, which wasn't sitting right with me. I asked him what happened, and we got right into it. No detective work needed.

"I love my wife. I love my kids. I've tried to contact the kids, but the wife doesn't think that's a good idea right now. Everyone assumes you're doing something bad when you're going to a foreign country alone. You're definitely cheating or something—"

"But, uh—" I interrupted, motioning with my chin to the girl he arrived with sitting on the other side of the bar.

"Yeah, but I wasn't at first. I was just trying to find myself. And fuck it, you know. If everyone is already sure I'm doing it, then why not? Y'know. Why not?"

"Why did you get kicked out of so many hostels?"

"Who told you I got kicked out? That fucker, Lalo? Hookers, man."

I coughed.

“At first, I couldn’t figure out who was on the clock and who wasn’t until the bill came. I thought I was just popular. A cool American. But they’d ask for money in the morning, sure as the sun came up. The hostels didn’t like the way it looked having working ladies around and didn’t believe I didn’t know. I guess one or two of ’em were young, y’know, but I didn’t check, really. They’d say an age, and I’d go with it. Fucking Lalo and his lackeys.” He paused and took an angry pull at his beer. “Wanted me to ID them.” He grinned, “Who IDs a hooker?”

He had some convincing points.

“It’s a way of life down here, you know. I’m just participating. They make more with me in an hour than they can in another job in a week! I don’t think about it any other way than that. These people just want to deny their livelihoods. Probably jealous, that’s all. Whatever, man.”

He paused and looked down at his beer. I’d have been more disgusted if I thought any harder. Even in his speech, he seemed to be running from something, something he couldn’t speak more about. I changed the subject slightly.

“What’s going on with this guy, Domingo? He seems to like you.”

“Oh, ’Mingo? He’s the man. I ditched everything to come out here. He runs it all. If I find the girls customers, I get to stay for free.”

“You find them customers? Like a pimp?”

He looked appalled at that, cocking his head and almost slamming his beer on the table. “What?! No. I talk to other Americans who are already looking for girls, man. Jesus. Don’t be weird.” I didn’t feel like fighting that. We finished our beers and watched the sunset. I caught him up about my life—“Isabel’s pregnant”—and he seemed genuinely excited about the news—“Wow! Congrats. That’s gonna change your life.” I told him about Ricardo and his lot and said I’d make sure his family made it out alright. He thanked me.

“I gotta ask,” I said, the answer clear before the question, “You coming back with me?”

“I’m not,” Petey said, “Gonna stay the summer. I’ll be back eventually. I’ll see you back at Holiday Bar one day soon.”

The sugar-sand beaches of Palomino reminded me of the time Isabel and I took a trip to Pensacola. We had only been dating a few years when we hopped in my Nissan Altima and drove the coast from New York to Florida, staying in little sketchy hotels with burnt-out neon signs on our way down. We spent most of the days drinking cheap beers that came in buckets of six, only returning to the small bungalow with wicker furniture we’d rented to nurse my sunburn or make love or both. She told me later—drunk—that she’d thought I was going to propose on that trip. I didn’t. I didn’t even think about it. Maybe that was the time. Maybe it’s well past time now.

The sun was dying behind the dense canopy of trees as the bus wound through jungly roads, and I thought about what I’d learned from my first and only case. I had learned everything I came for shockingly quickly and succeeded with flying colors. It seemed Peter had left his family for good, but Petey was safe. He was clearly involved in a quasi-criminal organization led by a charismatic former banker and was definitely in love with hookers—information his soon-to-be-ex didn’t need—but he was alive and living on the beach. Right where we thought he’d be.

Once, in college, we'd planned a trip to a cabin in the Adirondacks for my birthday. We were all going to pitch in on a place to stay, beer, hot dogs, and magic mushrooms. I invited my closest friends and was excited to trip balls with them. Last minute, Peter dropped out, calling to tell me he'd met a rich girl a few days prior who'd invited him to her family's mansion on the Cape. He couldn't say no. "You understand, right?" he said. I understood. He spent the weekend having sex with some girl on her father's boat while all his friends tripped mushrooms and played beer pong, splitting his promised share of the costs. I didn't realize until now how much it had hurt or how often he'd done something like that till now.

This was just another example. We always joked about him being unable to settle down as a family man, even while he was moving to suburbia and having kids. He couldn't do it, we joked, and he clearly couldn't.

This realization gave me some relief. Despite the choices he had made and the pain he had caused, I still knew him. We'd thought he'd changed, but he had just kept doing what he always did. On the bus back to Medellín, I didn't yet know where I was headed or when I was going home. Staring out the window at the flashing, thick greenery, an American movie dubbed in Spanish played on the screen in the headrest in front of me, I relished the blasting air conditioning. Though I'd done what I came to do, something in me felt unsettled—no doctor's appointments, maternity clothes to buy, or Ikea furniture to build.

As I dozed off on the bus, munching a donut, I pictured Petey in the Expectant Mothers section of that same department store on the boyfriend couch—though maybe they'd call it a husband couch for him—contemplating the unimaginable act of abandoning his family, watching his fully pregnant wife figure-8 in between the crop-topped mannequins. Ready for summer.