

Tuesday Morning

Karly Stilling

8:45 a.m.

The door slams behind Jared as he makes his usual stormy exit. Sarah sits quietly at the kitchen table. *Breathe in. Out.*

She clears the breakfast dishes and starts the dishwasher. Her hands are still shaking and she runs them under hot water until the skin is red to match the welt on her cheek. She presses them against her face, hot and damp.

In the bathroom, she rubs on more foundation to erase the imprint of Jared's hand.

9:30 a.m.

"Morning, Sarah."

"Good morning, Bernice," Sarah says as she slides behind the reception desk.

"I'll be in meetings all morning, please hold my calls."

"Sure thing, Bernice."

Smile. Breathe.

10:45 a.m.

One of the other receptionists agrees to cover her for fifteen minutes.

“Missed my coffee break,” Sarah smiles at her.

“You must be the only government employee in the world who forgets to take her break!” the other girl says, eyes winking behind her glasses.

She slips out the front door of the building and walks down the block to the drugstore. Inside, she stands in front of the shelf of pregnancy tests. *Breathe.* She stares at the box in her hand and tries to read the instructions.

The noise of the explosion outside is sudden. It shakes the building hard; bottles tumble off shelves, roll down aisles. There is shouting and running and Sarah is running too, out into the street where she looks up at her office, smoking and collapsing in on itself. Around her, people pull cell phones out of pockets to dial 911. There is crying, screaming. It is surreal, like a dream. Sarah slips the pregnancy test she hasn't paid for into her pocket and walks to the MacDonald's next door, pushing past people crowding the exit and into the bathroom.

She sits on the toilet and listens to the sirens as she waits for three minutes to pass, thinking. Not of her coworkers, dead or maybe trapped in the rubble of the ruined building, but instead of the long days to come now that she doesn't have a job. And she thinks of Jared. And of how she should have been in the blast. *Breathe*. Her watch beeps. She looks down and sees the plus sign on the plastic stick and something falls into place inside her.

She wraps the test in toilet paper and puts it in the napkin disposal bin. She washes her hands and looks at herself in the mirror. Practices a smile.

11:00 a.m.

Sarah walks out of the fast food restaurant. Turns away from the police officers cordoning off the scene and the fire trucks spraying water on the flames. Away from the building she was supposed to be in, away from the life of hers that would have ended had she not taken a late coffee break in order to avoid being seen buying a pregnancy test. Pulling her wallet out of her purse, she removes her identification and drops it into a garbage bin and walks down the street.