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Silly Chaotic Nourishing Stir

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A wadded-up tissue of yours was waiting for me in the back pocket of my blue jeans, along with a bottle cap you found in the driveway, and a really, really long piece of dental floss. Strangely, these are just a few of my favorite things.

When I fell in love with you, you didn't even exist yet. You were a desire, a beloved pursuit, and a future I couldn't quite imagine. I nurtured you without knowing you, by eating what you made me crave, by walking, and stretching; I invested in a 529 plan, upgraded my car insurance, dreamed of summer camping trips, and teaching you how to appreciate nature. Now you are more real than anything I have ever known. You cling to me, and I to you. When you are sick, I am unwell. You've grown fat, healthy, and smart at my breast. We are connected genetically, by blood. The draw is irreducible.

People ask me how I am adjusting, as if your presence is merely that—an adjustment, but adjustments are merely shifts in behavior and thinking over time. I adjusted to your father's enthusiasm for fishing ten hours straight by bringing a good book, plenty to eat, and a blanket. And I adjusted to his need to put green chile in all food by adopting the same practice. While there is no equation that indicates how many adjustments equal a transformation, I can safely say you've necessitated the number. No man has ever created such a silly, chaotic, nourishing stir. A man who could would be bad for me. Let's put it this way, if your dad required as many adjustments as you do, there would be no you.

Per the beautiful design that biology brings, I have strangely and gladly put up with a lot as a new mom.

1. I'll never sleep through the night again. The wee morning hours are lovely, dark, and deep, and you must know they have great secrets to offer, else why would you be awake when someone of your tender age ought to be dreaming of life-size Legos?

2. I deeply miss those seven-minute showers. You sway at the slowly fogging glass door and perhaps wonder why I seem to be fading from view. You tug at the towel, spin the toilet paper off its roll, and experiment with the flavor of the objects from our various bathroom cabinets and drawers. Okay, okay, I'm getting out.

3. I liked wearing bikinis. You so enjoyed swimming in the confines of my belly that you remained two weeks after you were due. In that time, you put on the Freshman 15 in ounces and practiced some fantastic flips, stretching me beyond my capacity. Now my skin looks like a baggy shirt of your dad's, but vanity requires more time in the morning than I can offer.

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4. I learned to walk 38 years ago, but you insist being on the floor is where it's at. Among all of your colorful plastic shapes made in China, we squat and crawl for hours. Among flung Cheerios, soft broccoli florets, and gobs of applesauce, I swab the floor around your highchair on my hands and knees three times a day.

5. There isn't one soul left in this town who hasn't seen my milky bosom. You want to nurse in the darndest of places—in line at the post office, in the cramped and stale coffee-stinking waiting room at the Jiffy Lube, and just as I am about to give the waiter my lunch order.

6. I took pride in being prompt and productive. Arriving most places with a bit of sweat on my brow, an apology on my lips, and you jiggling in the crook of my arm is how we do it. Buying one book of stamps can take days, and so the bills become notepads for numbers, names, and other scribbles. Forget about the broken hinge on the toilet seat and the chipped paint on the bathroom ceiling. A phone call is returned because you fall asleep. Frazzled and past-due—that's me because of you.

7. I thrived on media that gave me some clue about current events. Forget The Economist or The New Yorker. Your favorite book is Goodnight Gorilla, whether I read it backwards, upside down, or again and again and again. There's so much room for interpretation. Is the zookeeper aware of the gorilla's shenanigans and just playing along? Does the animal exodus happen nightly? All of this is much more compelling than the woeful condition of many parts of Africa.

8. I enjoyed my table manners. You have effectively loosened the grip my East Coast upbringing had. The best way to get a grape or piece of ice down to a size you can manage is to chomp a bit off and then offer it to you as if you were my baby bird. And I'd never let a wayward dollop of yogurt go to waste just because it's clinging to your ear.

What could explain my tolerance for all of these changes in my life? Am I really that much in love?

1. Perhaps I'm under the influence of a biological imperative. I distinctly remember choosing to conceive you, but maybe your dad and I were compelled by a sub-cellular chemical reaction? Regardless, you have made an unruly momma bear out of me whereas before I was a jackrabbit. I'll do whatever it takes to continue the species or, put more gently, keep you alive and well.

2. Perhaps I'm under the influence of oxytocin, from the Greek meaning "quick birth". Called the cuddle hormone, it is released during labor, and after nipple stimulation, therefore facilitating your entry into the world AND your first months of eating. In fact, my milk is designed for your survival—it contains a perfect recipe of fatty and amino acids, lactose, and water. Not to mention the dose of immunities you receive—this liquid is all about love!

3. Perhaps it's because you make me pause in the present. You come at everything anew, and so I do, too. Discovery is something we can count on for the rest of our lives, but yours is so elementary and bright. You tromp into the busy world and peek in every corner. You delight in petting rocks wherever you find them and splashing in puddles. Watching your cousin blow bubbles makes you giggle and clap for more. I am now a dog person because the goofy, hairy beasts bring you immediate joy.

4. Perhaps it's because you make me think about the seven generations ahead and the seven from which we've come. You make me think about what I believe and how I can possibly articulate my convictions. You make me work harder at my relationship with your dad. You make me eat better. You make me stronger. You are maturing me.

5. Perhaps it's because, with no pretense or apology, you are your emotions. You drop a book when you're done with it, cry when something's not right, and dismiss someone with a "bye" or a "no" when you don't want them around. You have no fear of expression.

6. Or perhaps it's just because I feel better when you are with me, drooling on my arm, bopping me on the head with a toy, or forcing us to leave a restaurant. It feels unnatural to be without you. I want to be awake whenever you are, and will be even when your age isn't so tender. I want to be there when you discover how to turn the jack-in-the-box crank, stumble on a reasonable pronunciation of the word shoe, or get the spoon and oatmeal combination successfully in your mouth.

There has never been a man in my life who has brought as much as he has demanded. To you, I offer all of my pockets.

Toddler



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