XXXV "Birth is not only about making babies. Birth is about making mothers — strong, competent, capable mothers who trust themselves and know their inner strength." Barbara Katz Rothman 🦪 XXXV. å "A footling?" exclaimed Jack, feeling immense horror at the tone of voice the doctor had used. He could see the appearance of anguish on the man's face, and Jack knew that he ought to be very afraid. "What is there to do? How do you ensure this is safe?" he demanded to know. The doctor pursed his lips and thought seriously. "It is childbirth, milord. It is neversafe, particularly for children who are born early." Claire whimpered in between her pains and she reached for Jack. Susanna made way for her brother, and Jack sat down on the bed beside Claire, taking her hand with his good arm. Cecily gasped, and covered her mouth with her hands. She was near the doctor, and so could see what the doctor was seeing. "Oh, good Lord, it really is a foot." đ "Mother!" hissed Jack, as he turned his attention back to Claire's panicked face. She was bright red and slick with sweat. The veins in his forehead were practically bulging. Her eyes, though, were so fearful, and so in need. "Alright, alright," the doctor said under his breath. "I've delivered a footling before." "Did the child survive? Did the mother?" panicked Grace. "Susanna, please, send a note to my mother," she urged, and Susanna obeyed immediately, retreating to the writing desk. a Claire squeezed Jack's hand, but Jack noticed how the doctor did not answer the question. Jack did not know much about childbirth at all, but this was obviously not how it was supposed to be. "Everyone quiet!" ordered the doctor as Claire screamed through another pain. Claire tried with all her might to push, but the doctor looked dissatisfied and concerned. "The child won't deliver spontaneously. It needs help. First the knees," he murmured. Jack tore his eyes from Claire, and he looked to his mother. Cecily had her eyes trained on the doctor's hands as he manipulated the child. She was watching in shock, before she gasped. "Oh, oh, two legs," she cried. "Ten toes." "Now the shoulders ..." Claire screamed as the doctor manoeuvred the baby again, her wails laboured and exhausted. "Alright, everyone o the bed, I will need some room," the doctor then instructed seriously, and from where Jack was sitting, he could see the legs of his child being supported by the doctor. His chest seized, but he obeyed. "Doctor, the cord ..." Cecily uttered fearfully. a The cord? What cord? a "What about the cord?" stammered Grace as she climbed o of the bed. "What's wrong?" sobbed Claire. "Nothing, milady," replied the doctor. "This is the last of it, time for the head, and then she's here." a She.It was a girl. They had a daughter. a⁹ Jack watched as the doctor manipulated their daughter for the last time to free her head, and then she was born. His momentary joy all but dissipated when Jack realised that the baby made no noise. A cord, a bloody, fleshy cord was wrapped around the baby's neck, and no sooner had Jack noticed it, the doctor unwound it. Her skin and lips were turning blue as the doctor laid the baby down on the bed. a² She was tiny, lifeless, and Jack stared at her helplessly. No, this couldn't be it. The life lost today was not meant to be her If it was to be anyone, it should have been him. Claire cried again in a way that Jack had never heard before. It was the cry of a mother. a "Come on, little one," uttered the doctor as he leaned over the baby, shaking her and tapping her gently. He li ed her back and supported her head and patted her back, increasing the pressure. Slowly, very slowly, the blue of her skin began to fade, and the newborn pink materialised. And then she cried. And it sounded like the gates of Heaven. ā⁵ Jack sank to his knees and Claire whimpered as the baby was placed on her chest before the doctor returned to the end of the bed to conclude the birth. Claire pressed her lips to the baby's forehead and cried tears of happiness as their daughter began to settle. Jack felt his own tears falling down his cheeks as he got back up to his feet to kiss her as well. She had hair, a tu of white blonde, though it was matted down. Jack didn't care as he kissed her for the first time. He laid his hand down on her tiny back and felt the so ness and fragility of her skin. a⁴ "Congratulations, Claire, Jack," wished Grace, who was still quite shaken from the ordeal. "She is undoubtedly perfect." "Indeed," added Cecily reservedly. "You were very fair when you were an infant, Jack. I think she has inherited some of your features," she noted, approaching his side of the bed and noting the baby's hair. Her tone was not entirely sincere, and Jack knew in that moment that his mother was aware of the secret. She spoke for the benefit of the doctor, but Jack couldn't discern her true feelings. Regardless, he did not care. The child was healthy. Whatever his mother thought meant nothing to him. Susanna returned a er sending the note to Mrs Denham, and Adam accompanied her, tentatively approaching the bed to look upon his new niece. "A girl, is she?" Adam smiled, and clapped Jack on the back. "Congratulations, brother." Jack couldn't help but smile with pride as he looked back down at Claire cradling their daughter. "Do you have a name picked out for her?" asked Susanna curiously. Claire and Jack exchanged a glance. "I feel I suggested two thousand girls names, but Claire never liked any of them," replied Jack. "Well, I always knew, girl or boy, she would be named a er you," Claire murmured lethargically as she traced around the baby's lips with her forefinger. a⁸ *** Before the doctor le, he tended to Jack's arm properly, and placed it in a sling. Jack was lucky that the bullet had not grazed his bone, and that it was a flesh wound. He would need to keep it clean in order to keep it free from disease. The packing and bandaging applied by his wife had stopped the bleeding and had allowed Jack's body to clot naturally to stem the bleeding. a Mrs Denham arrived with Kate, Peter and Jem in tow, very alarmed as to the urgency of Susanna's missive, but were relieved to find that all was well by the time they reached Ashwood. They were informed of the circumstances of the birth, and Mrs Denham had needed some water to calm herself. She fussed over Claire and the baby, and they all had a turn of holding her, cooing her, and rocking her. Jack didn't complain, but he was anxious for his turn. á By the time everyone had departed, and Adam and Grace had retired to another bedroom, it was nearly nine o'clock in the evening. Jack finally was able to hold his daughter in his arms, or rather his arm, sitting in the bed beside Claire as they both looked down at her. a She was a perfect, tiny little thing. Her features were so small, pink and delicate, and the minute he touched his finger to her palm, she wrapped her little hand around him. This child was brand new, faultless, and without sin or injury. No one had harmed her, no one had hurt her, and she had never known pain or su ering. Her life had just begun, and Jack felt it in his bones that it was his responsibility to ensure she grew up in a wondrous place of opportunity. a Jack's attention was grabbed by the sound of Claire's so snores, and he saw that she had fallen asleep, a look of true exhaustion on her face. They had yet to speak properly, and they would, but Claire needed to rest. a Jack carefully got up from the bed and carried the baby over to the armchair by the fire that was crackling away. Jack sat down slowly as he cuddled the baby into his chest. He was not yet an expert on how to handle children and doing it with only one arm was not easy. a She was clean now, and her hair was dry, and Jack could see the true blonde of it in the firelight. She was, indeed, very fair, but her beauty was all her mother. Clearly. đ "You will never know a day where you feel unloved, little one. That is my promise to you," Jack whispered to her. ď At that moment, the door to the bedroom opened quietly. Jack looked up to see his mother entering, balancing a tray against her hip, before she shut the door behind her. Cecily first looked at the bed, before she spied Jack by the fire. She carried the tray over to Jack and set it down on the small table between the armchairs. She had brought some sandwiches. "I thought you might be hungry for a light supper," murmured Cecily as she sat down in the chair beside Jack. "Thank you," replied Jack awkwardly. It was a very strange notion indeed to be witnessing thoughtfulness from his mother. "Jacqueline Beatrice Beresford," Cecily uttered, testing the name on her tongue. "Well, I know where Claire got Jackie from. From whence does Beatrice originate?" a⁵ Jack thought back to the conversation he and Claire had shared while reading the Divine Comedy. They had talked of Beatrice's divinity, and how Dante had painted her in such a way as she had a ected him so. Claire had refuted her own divinity, but they could both agree that Beatrice suited their angel. a "A book," was all Jack replied, and Cecily managed a small smile. "But, of course." Cecily rested her hand on the arm of the chair and took a deep breath. "Jack, I will not pretend I approve of Claire's actions. Were it Susanna, I do not know what I would do," she said honestly. "But I do not condemn her. Believe it or not, I do understand what it is like to be young and in love, and to make decisions that you otherwise wouldn't." đ Jack frowned at her. "Claire does not need your approval, Mother," he said icily, though he had a hard time believing that his mother had ever been young and in love. From his experience, his parents had barely tolerated each other while his father had been alive. a Cecily nodded in concession. "Yes, you are quite right. She doesn't

need my approval. "But regardless of that fact, I know you understand that this secret of yours cannot go beyond those who already know it. You and Claire, Adam and Grace, and myself. We are the only ones who know the truth, and that is as far as it shall go." Jack gritted his teeth but forced himself not to tighten his gentle grip on his daughter. "She's not even twelve hours old and you are already concerned about her ruining your position?" "No, you misunderstand me," retorted Cecily. "My concern, I assure you, is for her, 'she clarified sincerely. "I know you think me heartless, Jack, and I know I have given you plenty of ammunition to fuel this belief. But I can see that she is yours, in every important way, and therefore, she is my granddaughter, and I would never let a vicious rumour ruin her chances." "You would see her as you do Perrie?" asked Jack sceptically. "As you do Lily?" Jack had been witness to his mother fussing over Perrie in particular with the sort of a ection he had never seen. Cecily nodded with conviction. "I will escort her upon her debut, and I will present her to the queen myself," she declared determinedly. But her expression changed to one of regret, to one of sadness and concern as she uttered words that Jack had never thought he would hear from his mother. "Jack, I am sorry," she said in earnest. "I have grosslyunderestimated you, and I am ashamed." Cecily looked into Jack's eyes with nothing by truth. "I made a judgement about you many years ago, and I have never allowed myself to see you as anything but. I held your mistakes against you, and I used them as proof of my own judgement. I never encouraged you, or supported you, or helped you to become a better man. And yet in spite of this, in spite of me, you have grown into a truly decent man. "What you did for Claire, when you owed her nothing, is perhaps the most selfless thing I have ever heard of. When Claire confessed this, I felt such incrediblepride to have you as my son. And as I felt this pride, I felt such grief and remorse at the fact that I did not know that this was the man that you are. I didn't know you, and that was entirely my doing. "I know I have not been the kind of mother that you deserve. I have not been the sort of mother that I would have wanted for myself. I allowed my own demons to poison me for a very long time, and I, as a result, lost all three of you for a time. But I know that I hurt you the most. I lectured you, I scolded you, and I never forgave your mistakes. I know exactly how I made you feel, and something wicked inside of me prevented me from comforting you. "It might be too late, and it might not mean anything to you, but I want you to know that I am eternally grateful for you, and I am so

very proud of you.

like you."

her chair.

"Yes?"

wish I had listened to him years ago.

"You are bright, you are kind, and you are decent, and I know, I know

that you will achieve great things. Your father knew this, too, and I

"When I thought you might be hurt today, you might be killed -"

Cecily voice cracked, and she quickly composed herself. "I couldn't

bear it. The very idea that you could be lost to me before I even really

found you was unthinkable. I love you, Jack, and I always have in my

way. But I am determined to be better ... I am determined to be more

Were Jack not so determined to remain upright for the sake of his

She was sorry. She was proud. And she loved him.

resentment, he was lost for words.

"Mother," said Jack so ly.

about my business in London."

still hate me hahaha

Vote and comment!

child, he might have passed out on the floor. Pigs would fly before he

had everthought he would hear such words from his mother, and yet

Jack couldn't help it as a tear rolled down his cheek as he stared at

"I will leave you with her," Cecily announced quietly as she rose from

mother for as long as he could remember. He could not remember a

his mother. He didn't know what to say. A er so many years of

As she went to leave, Jack felt his chest lurch. He had hated his

time when she had ever approved of him. While he sometimes

wanted it. No child wanted to be unloved by a parent.

behaved poorly to spite her, Jack would have been lying if he had

ever said that he didn't want his mother's approval. Of course, he

"Won't you stay a while? I ... I have something to tell you ... something

Coming to you a bit later! I realised I forgot an author's note! I

random time for me but I'd replied to all my emails by 8:15am

I hope you enjoyed it!! See, I can be nice sometimes!! Do you all

We're nearing the end of this journey, which means Susanna's is

Okay, better go as Ash Barty just started playing so let's gooooog

about to start! I can't wait to take her on her adventure!

was so excited to post that I forgot!! Whoops. But surprise! Very

and was like what now? So I thought I'd writer and here we are!

the fragility of her tone of voice told Jack that she meant every word. A

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