

# COFFEE



Tuesday morning. I release the clutch, accelerate. I brake, accelerate, brake, press the clutch: the infernal traffic of the M-30 makes no exceptions.

“Call Rachel uni — I order the virtual assistant as I honk the horn. — Call Rachel uni!” My baby, in her four hundred bucks approved car seat, cries.

Fifty minutes later, I finally manage to park four blocks from the café. “Yes, I know, it would have taken 15 minutes to walk. What can I do? I’m a slave to the heated seat”.

“I’m so sorry, bird. Caravan, green zone, you know...”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ve only just arrived,” — she smiles as she rests a magazine on the table, — I’ve ordered you a Moka coffee, your favourite.”

I park the trolley next to me. Rachel is making faces at the baby, giving it faces. I take a sip of coffee as a peekaboo echoes in my ears. “It’s disgusting, it’s cold!”

“It’s been seven months since we last met.”

“Yes pretty. Life, I can’t get enough. — I say as I gesture to the waiter and point to the coffee — Another, please.”

“How’s being a mother? And the pregnancy? — She asks without looking at me, covering her face, only to show it again a moment later. — It must be a wonderful experience, right?”

I glance sideways at Jorge: he’s kicking at the air, slapping his blanket off; I watch his little mouth: a toothless *nipple crusher*. Rachel covers him.

“Ugh! You see, ‘marvellous’. — Suddenly, I’m in the mood for ham. — And a ham toast! With extra virgin olive oil! — I shout to the waiter. — Look at that, — I point to my hips — four sizes up, bird! And the tits? I’m a fucking milk dispenser with nipples like *country crackers*.”

Rachel *laughs*. It’s not fucking funny to me.

“Two mastitis. Two! — I emphasise with my fingers. — And the hair? That stuff about how you look radiant during pregnancy because of the estrogen ‘shot’... Look. Look!” I pull at my hair, and a strand of it falls through my fingers.

Rachel nods dumbfounded. “And, what am I going to tell you about the pregnancy? Stretch marks on my legs that make me look like a zebra; the last few months I’ve had constant reflux, — and whispering, I comment — that... that they say it’s because the baby comes with long hair... But look at him, baldy! The ‘spitting image’ of his father.”

I put a piece of toast in my mouth while I laugh, shake the cart nervously — which I sense is going to start crying — and, after slurping up a trickle of veined that had been hanging from the corners of my mouth, I continue:

“Ah. Yes, bird, and a tooth fell out! — I open my mouth, pointing to the gap with my tongue. Rachel’s pupils reflect the empty space between my teeth, along with half-chewed pieces of bread and ham. — Do you know why the windows in the maternity wing rooms don’t have handles? — I stare at Rachel and wait a few seconds. — Because of the post-partum depression. Mothers used to throw themselves out with their babies in their arms!

I notice that she hasn’t touched her coffee since we started talking. “She’s going to be cold!”

“At least the 7 stitches from the episiotomy are no longer oozing, and my crotch barely smells like rotten fish. So not too bad!” I emphasise, smiling wryly.

I look at her saddened face: a tear runs down her cheek. I read the headline of the magazine: *Baby Special: 8 things to consider for their neurodevelopment*.

“Shit...”; cold sweats. “On time...”; I throat clear. I stretch my arm out to reach her hand and, squeezing it lightly, whisper softly: “Okay, honey. How far along are you?”

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