

Baby Love

by Meakin Armstrong

She wanted one, she said. She wanted one who looked like me. I wanted one because I wanted her.

She tracked her cycles. Made schedules. I bought the things we would need: clothes, cribs, the rest. We planned and hoped. Months passed, then years. The manufacturer recalled the crib. The advice books grew out of date. The baby clothes had something wrong with them: they had too much flame retardant. Or too little.

We moved. In our new place, we set up a room for the baby, but it was smaller than the old one. I kept the larger room for a home office. My office had once been a baby room: over my printer were appliquéés of dancing pigs in blue pants.

I had our new baby room painted, but this time I didn't buy anything for it. I filled it with tax forms and books. In the corner was the old, recalled crib. It needed some sort of an adapter so baby heads wouldn't stick between the slats. I filled the crib with gifts we couldn't use: matching beer steins, a plastic birdbath, books, and old baby clothes.

My work-from-home scheme fell on hard times and we had to move to another place, a property I'd bought as an investment but had never planned on living in. It smelled of dogs and children. Even after we'd been there for many years, we found rawhide bones and pacifiers behind the refrigerator, under the stove, and in the basement.

We painted all of the rooms in that house, except for the one that had belonged to a twelve-year-old. It was girlish and lined with posters of teen idols. We liked it, its innocence and its little girl knickknacks. We furnished it with matching beanbag chairs from Costco. Mine was red, hers blue. Between us, we had a small

breakfast table. Every morning before we went to work, we sat in our chairs, ate our bagels, and looked at the posters.

