

WOMEN'S FICTION EXCERPT: *AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER* BY REBEKAH FRASER

A terminally ill man falls for a patient on the psychiatric ward where he works.

"Here we are," Donnie sang as he pushed the wheelchair into room 52. "Which bed would ya like, Irene? You're first in, so you get dibs."

Comment [ED1]: Wow! What a powerful story! You structured it so perfectly, leading to the terrible tragedy.

Of course, she didn't answer. He was just trying to make her feel safe. He'd been told his voice was, not like Paul's sultry baritone, but gentle, comforting. Donnie maneuvered the chair alongside the bed near the window, locked the wheels, and walked around the chair to see the patient's face. Her right eye was swollen, hair a tangled mess. Bruises covered her face and arms.

Comment [ED2]: How old are Donnie, Irene, and Paul?

Comment [ED3]: I notice that most of these paragraphs have a space before the first letter. You might want to check on that. I removed the rest of them.

"Can you stand, dear?"

Irene stared straight ahead, as if she didn't realize Donnie and Paul were in the room. On three, they heaved her out of the chair - dead weight - and settled her onto the mattress.

"Irene?" Paul asked, "Can we bring anything to make you more comfortable?"

His deep voice hung in the air. If Irene ~~were~~ was in her right mind, she'd ~~have been~~ swooning, like girls usually did when Paul was near. Lucky shit.

Comment [ED4]: Subjunctive tense. Verbs in "if" clauses are in subjunctive, because it isn't actually happening, it might possibly happen

Donnie slid the blanket from the foot of the bed over Irene's small frame. She was all skin and bones. "You're safe now, Irene," Donnie whispered. Her eyes sparked for just a second. Or did they? It could've been the lights flickering.

Comment [ED5]: Short? Slender? Petite?

Comment [ED6]: 1 space between sentences

The flickering of the lights in the emergency room had made Irene feel extra jumpy. Now, in this quiet room alone, Irene felt it was happening all over again; felt she was still sitting

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on the hard bench in the waiting room with her three beautiful children, rocking herself and Peter, felt she was watching Tina tell her story for the first time.

Tina's mouth - red from the lollipop they'd given her at the registration desk. Face - dirty from the sandbox. The bows Irene had so carefully tied that morning - undone, hanging limply from messy brown pigtails. Squeaky five-year-old voice repeating the story she'd told in the car.

"Petey wouldn't take his Teddy Bear, Mama. He threw it and screamed, so Daddy gave Peter some medicine."

"What medicine, Sweetheart?"

"Daddy's medicine."

What medicine? Irene had wondered, though she knew now, in the quiet room alone. But hearing the story in the car, and again in the waiting room, Irene had been confused.

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In the hallway, Donnie double-checked his assignments. It had been quiet on the ward lately, for some reason, which explained the empty beds in room 52.

The Professor shuffled by, an unlit pipe in his mouth. He held an open book in front of him, as if he ~~were~~ was reading.

"How ya doin', Professor?" Donnie asked loudly, receiving only a grunt in response.

"What's the deal with Irene?" Paul whispered. "She sedated?"

Paul's training period was over, but Donnie reminded himself that his little brother was still new to the job. Six months on the psychiatric ward was nothing.

Donnie looked at Paul - fit from his brief stint in the Navy, a strong, open face that attracted all the girls, dark eyes that revealed his smarts and his fear.

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Seeing signs of abuse reminded Paul of their own sometimes harsh upbringing, and made him nervous. Donnie had done what he could to protect his little brother growing up, but he couldn't be there all the time. He'd heard it always got worse for Paul when he went away. Now, Paul was the one protecting him, not from abuse, but from —

Comment [ED7]: Where?

Paul repeated the question, and Donnie realized he had spaced out again. "No, she's not sedated. There was a bad scene in the E.R. and she dissociated."

"Dissociated?" Paul asked.

"Checked out, ya know? Like an altered state. Still conscious, but in her mind she's somewhere else."

Irene shifted Peter's body so she could see his face. He was still sleeping, his mouth frozen in a dopey grin, eyes half open - creepy. If his body hadn't been ~~wasn't~~ so warm, Irene might have thought _____, she shuddered at what she might have thought.

Comment [ED8]: Subjunctive again

"Why does he look like that, Mom?" Jimmy asked.

Irene was afraid to look into her older son's wise blue eyes. Now that he was twelve, it was harder to hide things from him. She shook her head. "I don't know, Sweetheart."

Tina continued, like a broken record. She'd told them the story over and over since they got in the car. "Petey didn't like the shot, but then he went to sleep. It was a scary kind of sleep, and I told Daddy, but Daddy wasn't listening. Daddy was taking his shot."

Irene couldn't stand to hear it; couldn't stand not to hear it; didn't know how to respond. "You took care of your baby brother, just like a big girl, Tina. You're Mama's good girl."

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Tina looked into her mother's face, earnest, urgent. "I don't know why Daddy likes shots, 'cause nobody else in the whole world likes shots, but he really does, Mama. He really does. He even said, 'Tina, this medicine makes daddy feel so good,' and he smiled, and closed his eyes."

"Irene, can you open your eyes?"

His soft voice roused her from the deep sleep into which she had drifted. Kind. Familiar. Musical.

"Irene? It's supper time. Will you come to the dining room?"

She opened her eyes a crack. Dark hair, dark eyes, soft features. White uniform. He was kneeling beside her on one knee, steadying himself with his hands. His fingertips were pudgy, like little clubs. His face was close. Handsome. Warm. Open.

"Are you hungry?"

A quiet moan was all she could manage. "Peter?"

"I'll bring something to your room, all right? -You like fish or steak?"

She nodded.

"Steak?"

His shoes squeaked as he walked away.

Irene looked at the white linoleum, white walls, white blanket covering her body. She fingered the hospital bracelet on her wrist, heard the social worker's voice in her head.

"Tina 'n Jimmy are good kids. We'll make sure they go to good homes."

"What?!?!"

"We'll keep 'em together, if possible."

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“What? But, I, I just went, I just went next door. I, I, I was just having coffee with my neighbor.”

“There are many responsible families in our foster care system who will—“

“Responsible! I’m, I’m... Jimmy was in the backyard playing with the neighbor’s son. Tina and Peter were home with their father.”

“They’re not safe in your home, and it looks like you’re not safe in your home, either.

Are you?”

Irene sat up and tried to shake the memory out of her head. She imagined Peter’s chubby little face laughing. His fat fingers holding crayons. Peter learning to walk, climbing onto the couch, bouncing to music. Peter giving her slobbery baby kisses. Peter - happy, a normal boy, a sweet, normal, healthy eighteen-month-old. Her baby. Playing in the sandbox with the big kids. Swinging with Tina at the playground. Riding on his big brother’s shoulders. Giggling. Happy. Normal. Tina calling, “Mama!” Fear in her voice. Peter limp in his big sister’s arms. “What happened??? Peter? What HAPPENED, Tina?”

“Daddy gave Peter his medicine and he fell over.”

What medicine? No time to listen, scooping them both into her arms with a strength Irene didn’t know she had, running to the car, calling, screaming for Jimmy to come, to hurry, to get in the car. Jimmy panting, asking *What happened?* Driving to the hospital.

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Peter? “Mama’s here, baby. Mama’s here. Everything’s okay, Peter. You’re okay, Sweetheart.”

But he wasn’t.

I never shoulda left him.

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Now, her chest was caving in, shoulders rounding, breath leaving. It was like she was sitting on the emergency room bed again, holding Tina in one arm and Jimmy in the other, feeling the emptiness on her lap where Peter had been sitting before they took him away for tests.

It was like the doctor was standing in front of her again, saying words she couldn't recognize.

"The problem is your 18-month-old just OD'd on heroin."

"Heroin!?!"

"— which caused something called hypoxia."

"How would he get heroin?"

"Hypoxia starved his brain of oxygen, and the brain damage is permanent."

"Brain dam- That's not possible, Doctor."

"There's nothing we can do, Mrs. Boutelle."

"His father just gave him some medicine to make him stop crying. Right, Tina?"

Tina piped up, "Daddy gave him some of his medicine, and he said, 'This medicine makes Daddy feel so good, Tina,' and he smiled, and—"

The doctor cleared his throat and looked pointedly at Irene. She was dumbstruck. That medicine. Tina's talking about heroin. Michael's using drugs? Where's he getting them? My husband's using drugs. He gave drugs to our baby to keep him quiet.

"Oh, God!"

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Boutelle. We're going to make sure Peter is stabilized and then he's going to an institution for the mentally retarded."

"Oh, God!"

Comment [ED9]: Would probably use another term.

JULIE

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A terminally ill man chooses to spend the end of his life in a hospital caring for others?
How long does he have?

A terminally ill man falls for a patient on the psychiatric ward where he works.

Q: I'm wondering so long as who's together?

"Here we are," Donnie sang as he pushed the wheelchair into room 52. "Which bed would ya like, Irene? You're first in, so you get dibs."

Of course she didn't answer. He was just trying to make her feel safe. He'd been told his voice was soothing, not like Paul's sultry baritone, but gentle, comforting. Donnie maneuvered the chair alongside the bed near the window, locked the wheels, walked around the chair to see the patient's face. Her right eye was swollen, hair a tangled mess. Bruises covered her face and arms. "Can you stand, Dear?"

What are their eyes? Would he call her "Dear"?

Irene stared straight ahead, as if she didn't realize Donnie and Paul were in the room. On three, they ^{ADV} heaved her out of the chair - dead weight - and settled her onto the mattress.

"Irene?" Paul asked, "Can we bring anything to make you more comfortable?"

His deep voice hung in the air. If Irene ^{were} was in her right mind, she'd be swooning, like girls usually did when Paul was near. lucky shit. necessary?

Donnie slid the blanket from the foot of the bed over Irene's small frame. She was all skin and bones. "You're safe now, Irene," Donnie whispered. Her eyes sparked for just a second. Or did they? It could've been the lights flickering.

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carefully
gently
gingerly
abruptly

JULIE

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verb
tense

"How ya doin', Professor?" Donnie asked loudly, receiving only a grunt in response.

"What's the deal with Irene?" Paul whispered. "She sedated?"

Paul's training period was over, but Donnie reminded himself his little brother was still new to the job. Six months on the psychiatric ward was nothing. Donnie looked at Paul - fit from his brief stint in the Navy, a strong, open face that attracted all the girls, dark eyes that revealed his smarts and his fear. Seeing signs of abuse reminded Paul of their sometimes harsh upbringing and made him nervous. Donnie had done what he could to protect his little brother growing up, but he couldn't be there all the time. He'd heard it always got worse for Paul when he went away. Now, Paul was the one protecting him, not from abuse, but from —

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Paul repeated the question, and Donnie realized he had spaced out again. "No, she's not sedated. There was a bad scene in the E.R. and she dissociated."

"Dissociated?" Paul asked.

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Irene shifted Peter's body so she could see his face. He was still sleeping, his mouth frozen in a dopey grin, eyes half open - creepy. If his body wasn't so warm, Irene might have thought... she shuddered at what she might have thought.

"Why does he look like that, Mom?" Jimmy asked. Irene was afraid to look into her older son's wise blue eyes. Now that he was twelve, it was harder to hide things from him. She shook her head, "I don't know, Sweetheart."

Tina continued, like a broken record. She'd told them the story over and over since they got in the car. "Petey didn't like the shot, but then he went to sleep. It was a scary kind of sleep, and I told Daddy, but Daddy wasn't listening. Daddy was taking his shot."

Irene couldn't stand to hear it; couldn't stand not to hear it; didn't know how to respond. "You took care of your baby brother, just like a big girl, Tina. You're Mama's good girl."

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JULIE

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Irene looked at the white Linoleum, white walls, white blanket covering her body. She fingered the hospital bracelet on her wrist, heard the social worker’s voice in her head.

“Tina ’n Jimmy are good kids. We’ll make sure they go to good homes.”

“What?!?!?”

“We’ll keep ‘em together if possible.”

“What? But, I, I just went, I just went next door. I, I, I was just having coffee with my neighbor.”

“There are many responsible families in our foster care system who will—“

“Responsible! I’m, I’m... Jimmy was in the backyard playing with the neighbor’s son.

Tina and Peter were home with their father.”

Why won't they stay with relatives - aunt grandma?

JULIE

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"They're not safe in your home, and it looks like you're not safe in your home, either.

Are you?"

Irene sat up and tried to shake the memory out of her head. She imagined Peter's chubby little face laughing. His fat fingers holding crayons. Peter learning to walk, climbing onto the couch, bouncing to music. Peter giving her slobbery baby kisses. Peter - happy, a normal boy, a sweet, normal, healthy eighteen-month-old. Her baby. Playing in the sandbox with the big kids. Swinging with Tina at the playground. Riding on his big brother's shoulders. Giggling. Happy. Normal. Tina calling, "Mama!" Fear in her voice. Peter limp in his big sister's arms. "What happened??? Peter? What HAPPENED, Tina?"

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Peter? "Mama's here, ~~B~~aby. Mama's here. Everything's okay, Peter. You're okay, Sweetheart." But he wasn't. I never shoulda left him.

Now, her chest was caving in, shoulders rounding, breath leaving. It was like she was sitting on the emergency room bed again, holding Tina in one arm and Jimmy in the other, feeling the emptiness on her lap where Peter had been sitting before they took him away for tests. It was like the doctor was standing in front of her again, saying words she couldn't recognize.

"The problem is your 18-month-old just OD'd on heroin."

"Heroin!?!"

"— which caused something called hypoxia."

"How would he get heroin?"

So sorry,
Mrs. Santelle

JULIE

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"Hypoxia starved his brain of oxygen, and the brain damage is permanent."

"Brain dam- That's not possible, Doctor."

"There's nothing we can do, Mrs. Boutelle."

"His father just gave him some medicine to make him stop crying. Right, Tina?"

Tina piped up, "Daddy gave him some of his medicine, and he said, 'This medicine makes Daddy feel so good, Tina, and he smiled, and--"

The doctor cleared his throat and looked pointedly at Irene. She was dumbstruck. That medicine. Tina's talking about heroin. Michael's using drugs? Where's he getting them? My husband's using drugs. He gave drugs to our baby to keep him quiet. "Oh, God!"

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Boutelle. We're going to make sure Peter is stabilized and then he's going to an institution for the mentally retarded."

"Oh, God!"

HAS IRENE ANY INKLING THAT MICHAEL IS "USING"?
WHY ARE THE CHILDREN TAKEN AWAY FROM HER?
REMOVE HUSBAND/FATHER FROM THE HOME.
WHY IS SHE IN TROUBLE FOR HAVING COFFEE NEXT DOOR?

JIMMY IS 12.

SHE ASSUMED THAT MICHAEL WAS CAPABLE OF WATCHING
HER CHILDREN.

AH! ARE WE TO ASSUME THAT IRENE HAS A LONG
HOSPITAL STAY. I THOUGHT IT WAS SHORT-LIVED SHOCK.

THE READER NEEDS TO KNOW MORE OF PAUL AND BONNIE'S
FRATERNAL RELATIONSHIP/SEE MORE INTERACTION BETWEEN
THEM TO REALLY CARE ABOUT THEM.

WOMEN'S FICTION EXCERPT: *AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER* BY REBEKAH FRASER

Rebekah-

You're really dealing with a profoundly psychologically charged situation. Good luck with that. Everyone has opinions in that area and most of those opinions are biased or not based in research or experience.

We have Donnie and Paul, attendants in a mental institution. They're taking care of Irene, a woman who has suffered a deep psychological trauma. Peter, her son, was accidentally killed by her husband, a heroin addict. The husband had given Peter, a lethal injection to keep him quiet.

The family has been sent off to foster homes while she is recovering in the hospital. She blames herself and has been dissociated ever since. No mention at this point of anything about her husband.

I've imbedded some suggestions throughout the submission.

You have a difficult topic to deal with. There has to be some lightness. Too much tragedy becomes the normal and it loses its effect on the reader. Right now, she's as low as she can be. I hope something good happens, soon.

Good luck-

Dave

A terminally ill man falls for a patient on the psychiatric ward where he works.

"Here we are," Donnie sang as he pushed the wheelchair into room 52. "Which bed would ya like, Irene? You're first in, so you get dibs."

Of course she didn't answer. He was ^{where is Paul?} just trying to make her feel safe. He'd been told his voice was soothing, not like Paul's sultry baritone, but gentle, comforting. *(Reference to Paul sounded as though he were somewhere else but familiar. Can you try to allow the reader to understand that both Donnie and Paul are here with Irene?)* Donnie maneuvered the chair alongside the bed near the window, locked the wheels, *and* walked around the chair to see the patient's face. Her right eye was swollen, hair a tangled mess. Bruises covered her face and arms. "Can you stand, Dear?"

Irene stared straight ahead, as if she didn't realize Donnie and Paul were in the room. On three, they heaved her out of the chair - dead weight - and settled her onto the mattress.

"Irene?" Paul asked, "Can we bring anything to make you more comfortable?"

His deep voice hung in the air. If Irene was in her right mind, she'd be swooning, like girls usually did when Paul was near; lucky shit.

Donnie slid the blanket from the foot of the bed over Irene's small frame. She was all skin and bones. *(Earlier referred to dead weight. Doesn't sound like skin and bones.)* "You're safe now, Irene" Donnie whispered. **Her eyes sparked for just a second. Or did they? It could've been the lights flickering.** *(Who noticed the 'sparkle? Might be a POV problem.)*

The flickering of the lights in the emergency room had made Irene feel extra jumpy. Now, in this quiet room alone, Irene felt it *(No need to be secretive. Come out and describe the 'it' without dancing around it.)* was happening all over again, *felt she was still sitting on the hard bench in the waiting room with her three beautiful children, rocking herself and Peter, felt she was watching Tina tell her story for the first time. Tina's mouth - red from the lollipop they'd given her at the registration desk. Face - dirty from the sandbox. The bows Irene had so carefully tied that morning - undone, hanging limply from messy brown pigtails. Squeaky five-year-old voice repeating the story she'd told in the car. "Petey wouldn't take his Teddy Bear, Mama. He threw it and screamed, so Daddy gave Peter some medicine."*

When are we?

"What medicine, Sweetheart?"

"Daddy's medicine." *(Is all this a flashback? Is this the 'it?')*

What medicine? Irene had wondered, though she knew now, in the quiet room alone. But hearing the story in the car, and again in the waiting room, Irene had been confused. *(I'm confused too. Where and when are we in the story? The reader needs to be grounded as to when and where they are. The above is confusing.)*

In the hallway, Donnie double checked his assignments. It had been quiet on the ward lately for some reason, which explained the empty beds in room 52. The Professor shuffled by, an unlit pipe in his mouth. He held an open book in front of him, as if he was reading.

“How ya doin’, Professor?” Donnie asked loudly, receiving only a grunt in response.

“What’s the deal with Irene?” Paul whispered. “She sedated?” *(Sounds like he’s asking the professor.)*

Paul’s training period was over, but Donnie reminded himself his little brother was still new to the job. Six months on the psychiatric ward was nothing. Donnie looked at Paul - fit from his brief stint in the Navy, a strong, open face that attracted all the girls, dark eyes that revealed his smarts and his fear. Seeing signs of abuse reminded Paul of their sometimes harsh upbringing and made him nervous. Donnie had done what he could to protect his little brother growing up, but he couldn’t be there all the time. He’d heard it always got worse for Paul when he went away. Now, Paul was the one protecting him, not from abuse, but from *(Please don’t be coy here. Protecting him from what? If it’s strong enough for the story, it doesn’t do any good to hold it back.)*

Paul repeated the question, and Donnie realized he had spaced out again. “No, she’s not sedated. There was a bad scene in the E.R. and she dissociated.”

“Dissociated?” Paul asked.

“Checked out, ya know? Like an altered state. Still conscious, but in her mind she’s somewhere else.”

Very short segment. Needs to get filled in.)

Irene shifted Peter's body so she could see his face. He was still sleeping, his mouth frozen in a dopey grin, eyes half open - creepy. If his body wasn't so warm, Irene might have thought... she shuddered at what she might have thought. *(Please don't be coy. Just say what she was thinking. Let the reader decide if it would make her shudder.)*

"Why does he look like that, Mom?" Jimmy asked. Irene was afraid to look into her older son's wise blue eyes. Now that he was twelve, it was harder to hide things from him. She shook her head, "I don't know, Sweetheart."

Tina (Tina?) continued(,) like a broken record. She'd told them the story over and over since they got in the car. "Petey didn't like the shot, but then he went to sleep. It was a scary kind of sleep, and I told Daddy, but Daddy wasn't listening. Daddy was taking his shot." (I'm confused. Who is Tina? What shot are we talking about? Daddy taking a shot too? Too many missing connections.) *Sorry Missed it.*

Irene couldn't stand to hear it; couldn't stand not to hear it; didn't know how to respond. "You took care of your baby brother, just like a big girl, Tina *(Irene's daughter?)*. You're Mama's good girl."

Tina looked into her mother's face, earnest, urgent. "I don't know why Daddy likes shots, 'cause nobody else in the whole world likes shots, but he really does, Mama. He really does. He even said: Tina, this medicine makes daddy feel so good, and he smiled, and closed his eyes."

Again, this is an incomplete thought. I don't know what to conclude from this.)

"Irene, can you open your eyes?"

His soft voice roused her from the deep sleep into which she had drifted. Kind. Familiar. Musical.

“Irene? It’s supper time. Will you come to the dining room?”

She opened her eyes a crack. Dark hair, dark eyes, soft features. White uniform. He was kneeling beside her on one knee, steadying himself with his hands. His fingertips were pudgy, like little clubs. His face was close. Handsome. Warm. Open.

“Are you hungry?”

A quiet moan was all she could manage. “Peter?”

“I’ll bring something to your room, all right? You like fish or steak?”

She nodded.

“Steak?”

His shoes squeaked as he walked away.

Irene looked at the white Linoleum, white walls, white blanket covering her body. She fingered the hospital bracelet on her wrist, heard the social worker’s voice in her head. *(Bring it closer. What was she thinking? Was she confused? Dazed? Hungry? What?)*

“Tina ’n Jimmy are good kids. We’ll make sure they go to good homes.”

“What?!?!”

“We’ll keep ‘em together if possible.”

“What? But, I, I just went, I just went next door. I, I, I was just having coffee with my neighbor.”

“There are many responsible families in our foster care system who will—“

“Responsible! I’m, I’m... Jimmy was in the backyard playing with the neighbor’s son. Tina and Peter were home with their father.”

"They're not safe in your home, and it looks like you're not safe in your home, either. Are you." (This may well be true, but I doubt a social worker would confront a fragile individual like that. It's very harsh.)

Irene sat up and tried to shake the memory out of her head. She imagined Peter's chubby little face laughing. His fat fingers holding crayons. Peter learning to walk, climbing onto the couch, bouncing to music. Peter giving her slobbery baby kisses. Peter - happy, a normal boy, a sweet, normal, healthy eighteen-month-old. Her baby. Playing in the sandbox with the big kids. Swinging with Tina at the playground. Riding on his big brother's shoulders. Giggling. Happy. Normal. Tina calling, "Mama!" Fear in her voice. Peter limp in his big sister's arms. "What happened??? Peter? What HAPPENED, Tina?"

"Daddy gave Peter his medicine and he fell over."

What medicine? No time to listen, scooping them both into her arms with a strength Irene didn't know she had, running to the car, calling, screaming for Jimmy to come, to hurry, to get in the car. Jimmy panting, asking what happened? Driving to the hospital. *(Where is Daddy? If she ignorant of his addiction, wouldn't she have called to her husband for the ride to the hospital?)*

Peter? "Mama's here, baby. Mama's here. Everything's okay, Peter. You're okay, Sweetheart." But he wasn't. I never shoulda left him.

Now, her chest was caving in, shoulders rounding, breath leaving. It was like she was sitting on the emergency room bed again, holding Tina in one arm and Jimmy in the other, feeling the emptiness on her lap where Peter had been sitting before they took him away for tests. It was like the doctor was standing in front of her again, saying words she couldn't recognize. "The problem is your 18-month-old just OD'd on heroin."

“Heroin!?!”

“— which caused something called hypoxia.”

“How would he get heroin?”

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“His father just gave him some medicine to make him stop crying. Right, Tina?”

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“I’m so sorry, Mrs. Boutelle. We’re going to make sure Peter is stabilized and then he’s going to an institution for the mentally retarded.” *(Again, this term isn’t used. It would be characterized as a protected environment, or the like.)*

“Oh, God!”

Jenn's Comments

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Of course she didn't answer. He was just trying to make her feel safe. He'd been told his voice was soothing, not like Paul's sultry baritone, but gentle, comforting. Donnie maneuvered the chair alongside the bed near the window, locked the wheels, walked around the chair to see the patient's face. Her right eye was swollen, hair a tangled mess. Bruises covered her face and arms. "Can you stand, ~~Dear~~?"

Irene stared straight ahead, as if ~~she didn't realize~~ ^{weren't} Donnie and Paul were in the room. On three, they heaved her out of the ~~chair — dead weight —~~ and settled her onto the mattress.

"Irene?" Paul asked, "Can we bring anything to make you more comfortable?"

His deep voice hung in the air. If Irene was in her right mind, she'd be swooning, like girls usually did when Paul was near; lucky shit.

Donnie slid the blanket from the foot of the bed over Irene's small frame. She was all skin and bones. "You're safe now, Irene," Donnie whispered. Her eyes sparked for just a second. Or did they? It could've been the lights flickering.

The flickering of the lights in the emergency room had made Irene ~~feel~~ extra jumpy. Now, alone in this quiet hospital room ~~alone~~, Irene ~~felt it was happening~~ was living it all over

Comment [PHS IS1]: Is she ignoring them or is she traumatized?

Comment [PHS IS2]: Use em dashes

WOMEN'S FICTION EXCERPT: *AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER* BY REBEKAH FRASER

again. ~~felt she was still~~ ~~She had sat sitting~~ on the hard bench in the ER waiting room with her three beautiful children, rocking ~~her son herself and~~ Peter, ~~felt she was watching~~ ~~listening to her daughter~~ Tina tell her story for the first time. Tina's mouth ~~red~~ from the lollipop they'd given her at the registration desk. Face ~~dirty~~ from the sandbox. The bows Irene had so carefully tied that morning ~~undone~~, hanging limply from messy brown pigtails. Squeaky five-year-old voice repeating the story she'd told in the car. "Petey wouldn't take his Teddy Bear, Mama. He threw it and screamed, so Daddy gave Peter some medicine."

"What medicine, ~~S~~sweetheart?"

"Daddy's medicine."

What medicine? Irene had wondered, though she knew now, in the quiet room alone. But hearing the story in the car, and again in the waiting room, Irene had been confused.

In the hallway, Donnie ~~double~~-checked his assignments. It had been quiet on the ward lately for some reason, which explained the empty beds in room 52. ~~The Professor~~ shuffled by, an unlit pipe in his mouth. He held an open book in front of him, as if he was reading.

"How ya doin', Professor?" Donnie asked loudly, receiving only a grunt in response.

"What's the deal with Irene?" Paul whispered. "She sedated?"

Paul's training period was over, but Donnie reminded himself his little brother was still new to the job. Six months on the psychiatric ward was nothing. ~~Donnie looked at Paul~~ ~~was~~-fit from his brief stint in the Navy. ~~He had~~ a strong, open face that attracted all the girls, dark eyes that revealed his smarts and his fear. Seeing signs of abuse ~~probably~~ ~~reminded Paul~~ of their ~~sometimes~~ harsh upbringing and made him nervous. Donnie had done what he ~~could~~ to protect his little brother growing up, but he couldn't be there all the time. ~~He'd heard~~ ~~it~~ always got

Comment [PHS 153]: Use em dashes

Comment [PHS 154]: Hyphenated if used as a verb.

Comment [PHS 155]: You're introducing too many characters in the beginning

are they nurses or orderlies

Comment [PHS 156]: Stay in Donnie's POV.

Comment [PHS 157]:

Comment [PHS 158]: Protect from who? An abusive parent?

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worse for Paul when ~~Donniche~~ went away. Now, Paul was the one protecting him, not from abuse, but from ~~—~~ ^{?, say it.}

Paul repeated the question, and Donnie realized he had spaced out again. “No, she’s not sedated. There was a bad scene in the E.R. and she dissociated.”

“Dissociated?” Paul asked.

“Checked out, ya know? Like an altered state. Still conscious, but in her mind she’s somewhere else.”

Irene shifted Peter’s body so she could see his face. He was still sleeping, his mouth frozen in a dopey grin, eyes half open ~~—~~ creepy. If his body wasn’t so warm, Irene might have thought... she shuddered at what she might have thought.

“Why does he look like that, Mom?” Jimmy asked. Irene was afraid to look into her older son’s wise blue eyes. Now that he was twelve, it was harder to hide things from him. She shook her head. “I don’t know, ~~S~~sweetheart.”

Tina continued, like a broken record. She’d told them the story over and over since they got in the car. “Petey didn’t like the shot, but then he went to sleep. ~~It was a scary kind of sleep,~~ and I told Daddy, but Daddy wasn’t listening. Daddy was taking his shot.”

Irene couldn’t stand to hear it; couldn’t stand not to hear it; didn’t know how to respond. “You took care of your baby brother, just like a big girl, Tina. You’re Mama’s good girl.”

Tina looked into her mother’s face, earnest, urgent. “I don’t know why Daddy likes shots, ‘cause nobody else in the whole world likes shots, but he really does, Mama. He really does. He even said, Tina, this medicine makes ~~d~~Daddy feel so good, and he smiled, and closed his eyes.”

Comment [PHS 1S9]: From what? Why are you keeping it a secret from the reader?

Comment [PHS 1S10]: Doesn't sound like a five year old.

WOMEN'S FICTION EXCERPT: *AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER* BY REBEKAH FRASER

"Irene, can you open your eyes?"

His soft voice roused her from the deep sleep into which she had drifted. Kind. Familiar.

Musical.

"Irene? It's supper time. Will you come to the dining room?"

She opened her eyes a crack. Dark hair, dark eyes, soft features. White uniform. He was kneeling beside her ~~on one knee~~, steadying himself with his hands. His fingertips were pudgy, like little clubs. His face was close. Handsome. Warm. Open.

"Are you hungry?"

A quiet moan was all she could manage. "Peter?"

"I'll bring something to your room, all right? You like fish or steak?"

She nodded.

"Steak?"

His shoes squeaked as he walked away.

Irene looked at the white Linoleum, white walls, white blanket covering her body. She fingered the hospital bracelet on her wrist, heard the social worker's voice in her head.

"Tina 'n Jimmy are good kids. We'll make sure they go to good homes."

"What?!?!"

"We'll keep 'em together if possible."

"What? But, I, I just went, I just went next door. I, I, I was just having coffee with my neighbor."

"There are many responsible families in our foster care system who will—"

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"Responsible! I'm, I'm ~~_____~~ Jimmy was in the backyard playing with the neighbor's son. Tina and Peter were home with their father."

"They're not safe in your home, and it looks like you're not safe in your home, either. Are you?"

- Did she already have the bruises?

Irene sat up and tried to shake the memory out of her head. She imagined Peter's chubby little face laughing. His fat fingers holding crayons. Peter learning to walk, climbing onto the couch, bouncing to music. Peter giving her slobbery baby kisses. Peter ~~_____~~ happy, a normal boy, a sweet, normal, healthy eighteen-month-old. Her baby. Playing in the sandbox with the big kids. Swinging with Tina at the playground. Riding on his big brother's shoulders. Giggling. Happy. Normal. Tina calling, "Mama!" Fear in her voice. Peter limp in his big sister's arms. "What happened??? Peter? What HAPPENED, Tina?"

"Daddy gave Peter his medicine and he fell over."

What medicine? No time to listen, scooping them both into her arms with a strength Irene didn't know she had, running to the car, calling, screaming for Jimmy to come, to hurry, to get in the car. Jimmy panting, asking what happened? Driving to the hospital.

"Peter? "Mama's here, baby. Mama's here. Everything's okay, Peter. You're okay, ~~S~~sweetheart." But he wasn't. I never shoulda left him.

Now, her chest was caving in, shoulders rounding, breath leaving. It was like she was sitting on the emergency room bed again, holding Tina in one arm and Jimmy in the other, feeling the emptiness on her lap where Peter had been sitting before they took him away for tests. It was like the doctor was standing in front of her again, saying words she couldn't ~~recognize~~ ^{comprehend}.

"The problem is your ~~18~~eighteen-month-old just OD'd on heroin."

"Heroin!?!"

Comment [PHS IS11]: Didn't she know her husband used heroin? Would it be the heroin that surprised her or the fact he OD'd?

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"— which caused something called hypoxia."

"How would he get heroin?"

"Hypoxia starved his brain of oxygen, and the brain damage is permanent."

"Brain dam— That's not possible, Doctor."

"There's nothing we can do, Mrs. Boutelle." — really?

"His father just gave him some medicine to make him stop crying. Right, Tina?"

Tina piped up, "Daddy gave him some of his medicine, and he said, 'This medicine makes Daddy feel so good, Tina,' and he smiled, and—"

The doctor cleared his throat and looked pointedly at Irene. She was dumbstruck. That medicine. Tina's talking about heroin. Michael's using drugs? Where's he getting them? My husband's using drugs. He gave drugs to our baby to keep him quiet. "Oh, God!"

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Boutelle. We're going to make sure Peter is stabilized and then he's going to an institution for the mentally retarded."

"Oh, God!"

Would they use this term?

Comment [PHS IS12]: How did she not know if her 5yo knew?

Comment [PHS IS13]: She really had no idea her husband was an addict?

Comment [PHS IS14]: Wouldn't they give her the option to take care of him herself? They wouldn't even try any rehab for him?

Susan

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"You're safe now, Irene," Donnie whispered. Her eyes sparked for just a second. Or did they? It could've been the lights **tickering**.

Comment [s1]: These first two paragraphs are a good place to start, but I think they need to be tweaked. Honestly not sure how; write the rest of the book and then come back to it. Part of it is that Donnie starts talking about Paul, and I don't realize Paul is in the room until the third paragraph. Important to have clear sense of setting right from the start.

Comment [s2]: This is where we should find out that Paul is Donnie's brother.

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Comment [s3]: Use em dashes (see blog written by Jenn that describes em dashes, en dashes, and hyphens.

Comment [s4]: This entire paragraph needs to be a scene. She can even remember it in spurts, but you're telling here instead of showing. Some of the description is good-I highlighted

Comment [s5]: I pictured Donnie alone here as he passed the Professor. I need to know right away that he's with his brother so that the setting is clear in my head. Also, might be good to know earlier that Paul is Donnie's brother.

Comment [s6]: I'm not sure what this means. Does Donnie think that Paul could be abusive? Or the "fear" is the signs of abuse? For some reason this was a little confusing for me. Maybe you need to have a more obvious sign of abuse than a generic "fear" in his eyes. There needs to be a link from Paul asking about Irene being sedated and Donnie noting Paul's fear/childhood abuse.

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Irene couldn't stand to hear it; ~~couldn't stand not to hear it.~~ (how did it make Irene feel?); didn't know how to respond. "You took care of your baby brother, just like a big girl, Tina. You're Mama's good girl."

Tina looked into her mother's face, earnest, urgent. "I don't know why Daddy likes shots, 'cause nobody else in the whole world likes shots, but he really does, Mama. He really

Comment [s7]: Maybe this section should be in italics so that we know it's a flashback? I know not everyone in my group would agree with me but it would help orient me that it's a flashback.

Comment [s8]: Find a descriptor so that we know right away how old Peter is (shifted his infant body or something like that)

Comment [s9]: "like a broken record" implies the next sentence

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Comment [s10]: Condense this

“Are you hungry?”

A quiet moan was all she could manage. “Peter?”

“I’ll bring something to your room, all right? You like fish or steak?”

She nodded.

“Steak?”

Comment [s11]: Does she answer?

His shoes squeaked as he walked away.

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“Tina ’n Jimmy are good kids. We’ll make sure they go to good homes.”

“What? !?! What do you mean? They stay with me.”

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“There are many responsible families in our foster care system who will—“

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She thought, I never shoulda left him.

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It was like the doctor was standing in front of her again, saying words she couldn't recognize.

"The problem is, your 18-month-old just OD'd on heroin."

"Heroin?!" This doctor is crazy. What's he talking about?

"— which caused something called hypoxia."

"How would he get heroin? How did heroine get into my baby?"

"Hypoxia starved his brain of oxygen, and the brain damage is permanent."

"Brain dam- That's not possible, Doctor. None of this is possible. I don't understand."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Boutelle. There's nothing we can do, Mrs. Boutelle."

"His father just gave him some medicine to make him stop crying. Right, Tina?"

Tina piped up, "Daddy gave him some of his medicine, and he said, 'This medicine makes Daddy feel so good, Tina, and he smiled, and—"

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"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Boutelle. We're going to make sure Peter is stabilized, and then he's going to an institution for the mentally retarded."

"Oh, God!" She couldn't speak.

Good story. At this point, I haven't decided whether or not I like the mother. Not sure why. Maybe because she has no idea her husband is doing drugs? Maybe I'm not supposed to like her. I like how you wove in Tina, how she kept repeating what happened. I think overall you need to take your time more with some parts: I'd like to be there in real time rather than summarizing such important scenes.

Comment [s12]: I'm not happy with this change, either, but I think this needs to be worded differently.

Comment [s13]: I think the doctor needs to elaborate a bit more, explain why they can't do more. Or she needs to ask

Formatted: Font: Italic

Comment [s14]: In my opinion, this is way too abrupt.