

On August 31, 1986, in a glass-enclosed Chelsea loft infused with summer sunlight, John and I were married. He stamped on the glass, we were pronounced husband and wife, and Paul Simon's "Graceland," that year's chart topper, rang out as our recessional. For me, the song symbolized the consummate state of grace I'd attained by marrying my smart, seamless John; its exuberant sounds of zydeco, rock, and South African *a capella* harmonies conveyed my unbridled joy.

One year later, our beautiful daughter, Caroline, was born. Our ride to the hospital was pure Keystone Kops with a dash of Laurel and Hardy: "Ohmigod, my water broke! Ohmigod, get the bag, no, wait, you get the car, I'll get the bag. Wait, the keys—I thought *you* had the keys? Ohmigod, get some towels, this water is gushing... Get the car. *Get the car!*"

John and his dented Datsun sped me and my smelly towels through the Lincoln Tunnel to Mount Sinai Hospital, where for twenty-one hours I labored with him hovering close, mopping my brow and cracking jokes while exhaling me through our Lamaze regimen. Finally, I batted him away, bellowing, "Get the drug guy!"

When it was all over, after the last seismic push that sent our beautiful daughter into the world, I felt a gentle, warm washcloth in my battered nether region: John, tenderly cleaning me up. "I love you, baby," he whispered. "You're going to be a wonderful mother."

After the birth of our daughter, John and I cozily cocooned in Hoboken. Things felt so blemishless, we reminded ourselves of the Bohemian-bourgeois yuppies Hope and Michael on our favorite TV show, *Thirtysomething*. Hoboken back then was like

Brooklyn today, its streets lined with cafés and corner bars, vibrant with journalists, authors, actors, filmmakers, and musicians. I swam laps next to Tony Goldwyn, the gorgeous young star of the hit movie *Ghost*, shared a babysitter with Oscar-winning actor Chris Cooper, and rode the bus with Pulitzer Prize-winner Anna Quindlen, then author of a weekly *New York Times* column called “Life in the 30s.” Indie filmmaker John Sayles shot hoops at our local YMCA, while the co-creator of *Hair*, James Rado, lived just down the street. Catty-corner from our condo was the now-legendary Maxwell’s, headlining the best in punk and indie rock music. Italian widows, draped head-to-toe in black, peppered the pavement and the air smelled enticingly of frying dough and coffee grinding at the Maxwell House factory. Across the filthy yet glinting Hudson stood Manhattan in all its glory. Where better to be thirty-something in 1990?

Each weekday morning after John left for work, I’d make a mad dash for the Y to join “my girls”—a posse of fitness-freak moms with whom I did just about everything—for a five-mile run while our babies rolled around its child-care center. We reveled in our daily locker room banter about TV and movies, our petty marital spats and whiny kids, our preferences in disposable diaper brands. Then we’d eagerly burst through the Y’s heavy double doors and prance like proud Lipizzaners, evenly spaced, knees high, onto a sweep of road in Hoboken on the banks of the Hudson known as Frank Sinatra Drive. We loved running and, even more, running with each other.

Come Friday night, our husbands would loosen their ties, mix up intoxicating pitchers, and fire up the grill. John, having replaced his Brioni suit with a perfectly broken-in pair of jeans

and lovingly preserved blue t-shirt from college, was our chef, cooking the burgers impeccably. After dinner we'd pool our money and send someone out for a couple decent bottles of Merlot, then sit around the grill's dying embers, babies dozing on our laps, drinking and talking long into the night. John could always be counted on to spark discourse and elicit laughs with one or two well-timed remarks. I preened. So smart, my husband! My own boozy contributions to the conversation had a tendency to ramble on; when they did, I would sense even in the dark John's eyes rolling in semi-feigned exasperation. It was the same treatment his reporters joked about at cocktail parties. John always knew when we'd said too much.

Later, I'd put our daughter to bed and climb into ours. "I don't know what I'd do without you," I'd whisper, nestling into my husband's warm, rock-solid form.

On our second wedding anniversary, six months after Caroline was born, John gave me gorgeous Tiffany earrings with a card reading:

*Dear Maggie,*

*No gift can express my love for you. But I like little presents, nonetheless. Now we are three. We fight sometimes and we wish we had more money, but in truth I think we will look back on this as one of the best times of our lives. You are still, as always, the original spark of life, my sexy lover, and my best friend.*

*Love you always, Johnski*

The following fall, things started to change. We were delighted when we found out I was pregnant again, and over the moon

when the *Journal* picked John to oversee the launch of a historic third section of the paper. But during the ensuing months, as my girth swelled and our sweet daughter entered her “terrible twos,” he started coming home later and later, his eyes tired and red. Even his hands were red, or rather, covered by an angry red rash—the doctor said it was psoriasis, attributable to stress. Stress was apparently also behind John’s exhaustion, frequent coughs, and intestinal turbulence. He began to see a psychiatrist to manage it all.

All through that winter, as John’s mood darkened, I kept a stiff upper lip. I had to, minding a small child while pregnant with another. If I voiced concern, John would rebut it with, “It’s nothing. I’m tired. I could use a break, that’s all.” Sometimes he would add, “And I’m worried about money,” propelling me to solicit freelance writing assignments and choreography jobs. I was glad to do it; anything to relieve his mounting stress, which, if it continued, would kill us both.

One Saturday in late June, our son announced himself with sharp contractions. This time around, John and I left for the hospital in an orderly fashion, the silence of our drive broken only by my occasional whimper. At the hospital, the obstetrician pronounced me “just about there”—an hour or so from labor, in fact—whereupon John rose from his bedside chair and announced, “I’m just heading out for a quick bite.”

The doctor and I shot each other a glance.

“Now?” I asked.

“I’m hungry,” he said. “I’ll be back in time.” He patted my hand and left.

A sharp pain shot through my abdomen. The hell with his

goddamn burger and fries, I was having a baby! No—not *a* baby—*his* baby! The doctor mumbled something about checking on another patient and left me with the nurses.

As usual, John's timing was perfect. He made it back just in time to witness the birth of his son, Daniel, who tipped the scales at nearly eleven pounds. A few minutes after labor, as the doctor handed our son to me, I realized that John had disappeared once again. "I had a call from work," he later explained.

During the two weeks John was on paternity leave, he could barely get up off the couch. You'd have thought he was the one who'd just given birth to a size XL baby boy. Something had to be done to alleviate my beleaguered husband's debilitating stress. His birthday, during his first week back at work, was the perfect opportunity for a relaxing, intimate dinner at his favorite Greenwich Village bistro.

It would be just what we both needed.