

FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

Every summer we met up in a different city where one of our families lived. San Diego, Minneapolis, Camden, Pittsburgh. Other than a brief excursion to a butterfly garden or beach, every trip was essentially the same—hotel breakfasts with stainless steel coffee dispensers and plastic canisters of Cheerios and Froot Loops, hours in a dimly lit hotel pool where the kids splashed around and the adults drank the gin and tonics or vodka sours we'd poured into insulated coffee mugs in our hotel rooms. We knew the faint outlines of everyone's separate lives back home in their distant cities or suburbs, but these trips were for our children, and every conversation centered on them and "Jake Gyllenhaal"—the sensitive skin, the aptitude for spatial relationships, those big blue eyes and thick brown hair. To see all of them in one place made us dizzy.

That first summer, there had been eleven families who'd signed up for the sibling registry. By the second summer, there had been sixteen, and every summer after that, a slow trickle that added up to a number

that was beginning to make us uneasy. When would the vials finally run out? When would children who looked like our children stop being born? And, considering that we had yet to meet one of those hetero, two-parent families who grinned at us from the website—we were lesbian couples and Alex, a single mother by choice from the Detroit suburbs—how many other families were out there? But as anxious as some of us were, we were also grateful to be living in this moment and in this country, to have the thousands of dollars needed to create our families—and we were grateful for this group, which would provide our children with a glimpse into the other half of their DNA, a chance, perhaps, to make up a little of what had been lost in being born this way. And so, when a new family arrived, we answered the questions we always answered about our children's health, second parent adoption, the best phrases and phrases to explain all of this to a child. We cooed over their babies and welcomed these new people into our fold.

The eighth summer, there was just one new family—Izzy and Olivia and their nine-month-old daughter, Hattie. We knew already from our Facebook group that they were cooler and more attractive than the rest of us, but we didn't fully appreciate just how beautiful they were until we saw them in person. Izzy was slim and delicate with chin-length platinum hair, sharp cheekbones, blue eyes edged with dark liner. Many of us had never been women who felt comfortable in high heels or lipstick and now that we were parents approaching middle age, we dressed entirely for utility and comfort—cargo shorts and Fruit of the Loom T-shirts, Teva sandals we'd owned since before our children were born. Izzy wore leather flats and a silk blouse tucked into a pair of stiff high-waisted denim pants we understood must be trendy. She had the small, lithe body of a dancer and movements so graceful she made us self-conscious about how we carried our bodies.

Of the two of them, Izzy was the more conventionally attractive—she looked like a model—but it was Olivia, with her short edgy haircut and her masculine energy, who especially intrigued us. She was allur-

ing in the androgynous, macho way that felt both familiar and also completely reimagined—a better, sexier version of ourselves. Tall and lean, wearing long cutoffs and skateboarding sneakers, a faded T-shirt from an indie rock band we didn't know, the magnetic pull of a stylish tomboy old enough to have harnessed her powers. When she introduced herself, her handshake was firm and she held our gaze just long enough to make our hearts beat a little faster.

“Call me Liv,” she said, her voice low and husky as if she had just woken up. “It’s good to finally meet all of you.”

A group of us had just arrived at the rental car counters at the El Paso airport, and the kids were all tired of traveling and sticky with the milk and graham crackers we’d given them on the plane. Hattie was strapped into a tiny blue ergonomic stroller, half asleep, her pale cheeks flushed pink, her wispy baby hair slightly damp. She had Liv’s brown eyes and Jake Gyllenhaal’s thick eyelashes and thin pink lips. Like the rest of us, Izzy and Liv were carrying bags and a car seat, but all of their belongings seemed better designed and more compact than our own.

“Cool stroller,” Jenna, a mother from Milwaukee, said. “It’s tiny but looks so sturdy.”

Liv shrugged. “It’s from some European company, but we got it from a neighbor for fifteen bucks. The tot swap scene in Brooklyn is crazy.”

Our hosts, Amanda and Beth, lived an hour away in Las Cruces, and we had already sorted out ahead of time who would share car rentals, but now that we were in person, it was hard not to want to renegotiate. Was everyone happy in their assigned cars? Did anyone want to grab a spot in one of the minivans we’d rented? We did not ask why it was that Alex and her mother, two straight people who could never fully appreciate this couple or their magnetism, deserved this first hour of uninterrupted access to them, so instead we simply stood at the bottom of the escalator with jealousy, watching them disappear into the dark of the parking garage.