

“Maybe we should, like, get groceries.”

Bonk puts down the controller (he’s already won this round), and turns his whole body to face his friend on the sofa. The suggestion feels profound. “It’s not too late for us, is it?”

“I don’t think so,” Sliv says nonchalantly. It’s this nonchalance, this quiet sincerity, that inspires him. Anything can change. It doesn’t matter that yesterday he worked 12 hours straight and didn’t leave the house. Anything can happen -- you just have to go grocery shopping.

“You think we can still cook?” Bonk mumbles.

“We can figure it out.”

And that’s how it begins: a simple suggestion. No more partially rotted Chipotle bags, waiting by the front door to be thrown out. No more week-old boxes of pizza in the fridge. Garlic. Tomatoes. Peppers! Fresh things that perish, unless cooked into something delicious! *This can be us*, Bonk thinks eagerly. *We can become the kind of people who cook.*

They’re pretending they actually have time to cook in their day-to-day lives. But this playful suspension of reality, this beautiful dream, leads them to Trader Joe’s at the edge of closing time.

“Okay. Okay! What are we making? We gotta start with dinner tonight. We -- ”

“What about. Lasagna?”

Bonk frowns. “Lasagna? We’d have to eat it all in one sitting. It gets all soggy and nasty when you reheat it, you know.” He shivers; they’re in the dairy aisle. “I want something that I can eat, like, four nights in a row.”

Sliv considers this. “You don’t eat cold lasagna?”

“No, dude. Disgusting.”

So no lasagna. But pasta, with the right amount of cheese, could potentially work. They bicker for a while before deciding on some kind of chicken with vegetables. The recipe, they agree, doesn’t matter for now: just the core ingredients.

Bonk is bouncing as he walks, reverberating with excitement. *“Lovely chicken, wowie~ Sexy chicken, all for me~ Gonna slather you up --”*

“Please stop singing.”

“Please shut the fuck up.” Bonk nonetheless starts humming instead. It doesn’t really matter; they seem to be basically alone in the store. He turns the cart to the left, out of the aisle, and --

“*OOOF.*” A very light tap at the end of the cart. He stops immediately, of course, but he’d definitely hit someone. Slightly.

“OhmygodI’mso sorry,” Bonk throws his hands up and scrambles around the grocery cart.

“Are you okay oh my god?”

The first thing he notices is water, so much of it, all over the ground. A split-second thought: *Oh shit, there’s a spill! The cart must have slid... they gotta get on that.* His eyes travel up, landing on the pregnant woman in front of him. *Wait --*

“Uhhhhh,” the woman moans, clutching her belly. “Don’t worry about it... oh god...”

Sliv blinks. “Bonko, did you just hit a pregnant lady?”

“I DIDN’T HIT HER OH MY GOD I MEAN IT WAS JUST THE EDGE OF MY CART JUST BARELY I DUNNO -- ”

“And it looks like that induced some contractions.”

“WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN? HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT???”

“It means she’s in labor, bro. Her water broke.” Sliv steps around the cart to stand next to his friend. He looks around: no one’s here this late at night anyway, and they’ve reached one of the back corners of the store. The employees are probably restocking. He knows what needs to be done.

He puts one hand on Bonk’s shoulder, solemnly, and hands him a phone. “Call 911. Good luck.”

“YOU CAN’T JUST LEAVE???” Bonk screeches, smacking the phone back into Sliv’s chest. At this point he’s hyperventilating and sweating all over the place.

The woman lets loose a feral roar. “I think... *OOOOOH*... I think the baby...” She hunkers over, squatting, and her face is all puckered up and red.

*Looks like an heirloom tomato*, Sliv thinks absently.

“Someone call an...*AAAAH!*” The woman calls, raising a limp arm. She needs help, but --

“Not me,” he sighs, shaking his head. Instead, he dials 911, asking for an ambulance.

And in that moment, seeing this person in such a sorry state, in Trader Joe’s of all places... Bonko remembers one of his favorite TV shows. In it, some kids are born with *quirks*, which are superpowers as weird as spitting up bug acid or as powerful as creating alternate dimensions. It might be adrenaline, or whatever, but Bonk feels some kind of *quirk* coming alive in his own blood. Had it been there this entire time, waiting dutifully for this moment? Was it by fate’s hand that Sliver and Bonko appeared in front of this woman, in this grocery store, at this time? Had he been preparing for this his whole life?

*Anything can happen.* He notices his breath, fast and shallow. He inhales, exhales slowly. “I’m gonna do it.”

“...What?”

“I’m going to catch the baby.”

“No the fuck you’re not.”

Bonko, fire in his eyes, squats so he is at eye level with the woman. “Ma’am, what is your name?”

“The baby’s coming... I’m not gonna make it,” she bellows in response.

Filled with a newfound sense of purpose and strength, Bonk places a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

“Absolutely you are, ma’am. We’re not gonna let you die here. Not in Trader Joe’s.”

“We?” Sliv echoes.

“NO... I’m not OOOOOOOH... I’m not gonna make it to the hospital,” she says through gritted teeth. “I need... to take...” Straining desperately from her squatted position, she pulls off her underwear and lets them sit at her feet. The need to push is overwhelming. Shouldn’t she be laying down, not squatting? Fuck it. Childbirth class didn’t include the part where two strangers agree to deliver the baby in a fucking Trader Joe’s.

She locks eyes with the man in front of her, still holding her shoulder. She doesn’t quite believe him at first: he’s so young, so naive. But his gaze is -- stupidly -- steady and sure. When people talk about this moment, it’s always a story about looking into the eyes of a loved one and knowing that everything would be okay. This is all wrong. This stranger should be her wife. It should be her and her wife, holding hands in the delivery room of the hospital. What about *this* situation makes her feel protected? And yet: something settles in her blood.

“You can do this,” Bonk says gently. “Let’s take deep breaths.”

Something strange indeed. “Okay. Yeah.”

The ambulance arrives right as the baby is crowning. Sliv had slipped away to warn the employees. Meanwhile Bonko, realizing he needs to follow through on his pledge, is bravely holding back tears. His hands are stretched out, vaguely, as if catching babies is like the egg toss. He doesn’t know what he’s doing, but he’s doing it anyway.

The first responders, of course, shove him out of the way. After several nasty contractions, the baby is delivered into capable and sure hands (who have practice with this sort of thing). The woman and her newborn are hauled onto a stretcher for good measure, though they are both healthy and crying. Sliver and Bonko stand with the Trader Joe’s employees, watching as she is escorted to the hospital.

“Dude, we should have just ordered takeout,” Bonk sniffs, wiping fat tears from his eyes.

Sliv shakes his head. “If you can pull *that* shit off, you can definitely cook.”