



# The Fellow

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Rebecca leaned her back against the wall, welcoming its coolness against her warm skin. She'd been running around the hospital all morning, charting and rounding on patients, and was at last done with her shift. She lifted the steaming cup of coffee up to her lips and took a sip, not minding that it burnt her tongue.

"Aren't you ready to go home yet?" Kendra appeared at her side, her hands on her hips. Kendra was a legend L&D nurse, and the only other black woman on Rebecca's team. When Rebecca had first started her residency in pediatrics three long years ago, Kendra had taken her under her wing like a sister, showing her the ropes and watching her back.

"Just about." Rebecca took another sip. She gestured to the NICU in front of them, where through the glass window they could see a baby girl, who had come well before her time, sleeping in a pink swaddle. "I wanted to check on her before I left."

"She'll be just fine," Kendra reassured. "Her surgery went well. She should be discharged in a couple of days, give or take."

"And I won't be here to see it." Rebecca played with the waistline of her scrub pants, hoping Kendra wouldn't register the bitter bite to her words.

Her hopes were in vain. "You should be glad you're getting out of here. It's your last day of your residency, you made it! You'll never have to take another twenty-four-hour shift within these four walls again. I thought you wanted to go to the family clinic, anyway."

"Yeah, I do," Rebecca lied. "I've wanted to be a pediatrician with my own office since I started medical school, but after getting more experience...I don't know. I'm not cut out for hospital life, anyway."

"You're not cut out for this, or is Pete not ready to have his wife-to-be wear her big-girl scrubs and work where she wants to?"

Rebecca shook her head and sighed before turning to face Kendra. "Pete wants kids. I do, too, and working at an office is just so much more practical for me if I want to start my family. Pete said so, yeah, but, you know, I agree with him now. It'll be nice to get some sleep for a change."

"Probably should put that away then. You think we don't notice when you residents drink two venti coffees per hour?" Kendra smirked. "Your hands start shaking, you look possessed."

"Watch it, if I ever come back here, I'll be an attending, and I'll be your boss," Rebecca warned, all in good spirit.

"Like hell," Kendra snorted. Her pager beeped and she waved her friend goodbye.

Rebecca let her own fingers linger in the air as she returned the wave, wondering when she would see the older woman again. Or any of her friends from the hospital...Her superiors, her mentors, her peers...

Dr. Congues, Rebecca's teacher of the past three years, rounded the corner, his white coat tight around his gut. He tucked a clipboard under his arm as he approached his student. "End of an era," he declared, pinching his white beard in his fingers.

"Right," Rebecca said. Between the old man and Kendra, she wasn't sure who she would miss most. She looked back towards the NICU. "How's our girl doing?"

"Just peachy." He paused. "It's a slow day on the peds floor, I don't think I'd miss anything if I checked in on her. Like to join me?"

Rebecca smiled. "I wish I could, but I've gotta get home. We have a guy coming to check out our cable, it got screwed up a few nights ago from the storm, and Pete probably won't be home from work yet." She cast a longing glance at the window, the glare of its reflecting light illuminating her face. "Watch out for her, though."

"I will, I always do...Congratulations on passing your BOARDS, by the way."

"Thank you, sir."

"Start at the family clinic tomorrow?"

"No, I'm taking the weekend off. But

Monday morning, bright and early..."

"It'll be nothing compared to residency."

Rebecca nodded. Residency had been a bitch and a half, and she was glad it was finally over. "Well," she said into her coffee cup, "I should get going before I crash right here."

"Wouldn't be the first time. Oh, I was meaning to ask you, though. I was re-reading your admissions file a few months ago while working on reference letters. You initially went into this program with the ambition of becoming a neonatologist. What changed your mind?"

Rebecca thought back. What had changed her mind? "I guess I just didn't have it in me. Neonatology would mean three more years of fellowship, of being a student, endless nights and notes..."

"Dreams can change." The older doctor busied himself with unlocking the door to the NICU, but Rebecca could feel the judgement in his concession, and couldn't help but blush.

"It was just a matter of convenience," she explained, trying to shake the shame. "Pete and I live here, in the city, and the nearest fellowship program is hours away...It just wouldn't be practical."

"Well," Dr. Congues said, swinging the door to the premature nursery open, "If you ever change your mind, I've had your letter of recommendation written since you were three months into this program." With a small

smile, he left her to check on the little girl.

Rebecca flung her coffee into the closest trash. She couldn't even appreciate the sunset, despite not having seen the rays since she clocked in yesterday evening, as she exited the hospital. She was too exhausted to muster any sentimentality for the place that had been her home for three years, and who knew when she would ever be back, cracking jokes with Kendra or outperforming her male coworkers to their chagrin and Dr. Congues's pride? And the little baby, the last neonate patient of her entire career, what would become of her? Rebecca would never see the girl again.

Rebecca was lost in thought when she pulled into the driveway, not even registering that her fiancé's car was already there, as was another one. She trotted up to the front porch, shuffling in her purse for her keys. She hoped the cable man would come soon; she was ready to go to bed and sleep enough to make up for the last three years of taking notes and rounding on patients and taking notes and diagnosing little kids and all those notes...

She stepped upon the WELCOME mat, still fishing for her keys. But the door of the house swung open from the inside before she could find them.

"Oh!" Rebecca cried. She took a step back, almost losing her footing on the porch step.

"Um," the woman in the doorway said. She cocked a curious eyebrow.

"Who are you?" Rebecca demanded.

"Becky?" Another face appeared in the doorway, this one belonging to Rebecca's husband-to-be, Pete. He glanced between the two women.

"Excuse me," the woman said, running past Rebecca to the unfamiliar car in the drive.

"She was here for the cable," Pete explained.

"Oh," Rebecca sighed. She watched the woman drive away and shook her head. "I thought you said you'd be at work until six?"

"I thought you said the same thing. I came home early to meet the cable person."

"Pete! I could've - Ugh!" She was too worn out to explain wishing to see the baby once more before she left for good. It wasn't even her baby, Pete would say, none of them are your kids, Beck, why do you care so much?

"Anyways, I'm gonna go shower. Dinner at seven at Harry and Izzy's? Celebrate your new job?" He grinned at her, not waiting for a response, and leaned in to kiss her.

She let his lips leave her stunned face before she could even say sure. She turned around to shut the door.

"Hey, Becky?"

She looked over her shoulder at her fiancé.

"I'm proud of you."

She smiled at him with her whole face.

"Thanks. Go, I'll be right behind you, I need to change."

Pete disappeared from sight, and she heard the shower water running moments later. She smelled like hospital and decided to strip from her scrubs right then and there, maybe stumble into bed for a quick nap before Pete could yell at her to get dressed already. But a knock came at the door as she fumbled with her scrub shirt, and she groaned and yanked it back into place.

"Hello?" she asked as she opened the door.

"Hello, ma'am," the man across the threshold said. He was clad all in dark grey and had a cap on his head. "I'm here for the cable."

She stared at him blankly. His words were slow in reaching her ears. "The cable?"

"Yes, ma'am." The serviceman frowned. "This is 214 Oak, right?"

"Yes, but...The cable?" Rebecca's deprivation of sleep was affecting her like she was stumbling through a fog, but then, suddenly, everything became clear.

"Is this a bad time?"

"No," Rebecca said. "No, not at all." She looked around for her medical bag before remembering she'd left it in the car. "Come right in."

The man nodded as he crossed into the house.

"He'll be out soon if you need anything," she said, gesturing to the

bathroom. "I have to go."



Fifteen minutes later, Rebecca ran through the NICU doors, panting. She had paged her old mentor to meet her there off of Kendra's device, and, sure enough, Dr. Congues was rocking the baby girl to sleep in his arms.

"How is she?" Rebecca asked, catching her breath.

"Fine. She'll be just fine."

"Good." She took a moment to compose herself. "I want your recommendation after all. I'm applying to the neonatology fellowship. I want to do this for the rest of my life."

The doctor nodded. The baby stirred. The fellow smiled.