

One

Cora met Sam at a twice-weekly baby group in their small town. They sat on blue plastic mats in the back room of an overpriced children's clothing store. Their infants squirmed in front of them on sheepskins. The room smelled like breast milk and baby heads and cruciferous vegetables boiled down to weakened, mealy fibers one mom had brought in Tupperware and was trying to feed her ten-month-old.

"That baby doesn't want broccoli," said Sam.

He had a toothpick stuck to his lower lip. His mouth was sexy; the toothpick was not. He offered one to Cora. She took it so she could touch his hand. It tasted like cinnamon. Of all available affectations, this one was openly oral, wholly about his lips and tongue, either keeping them busy or drawing attention to them. *So, which was it?* she asked him.

"Neither," he said. Now he was using it to prod his incisors at the gum line. "Just something to do."

"To be a man and kill time chewing a wet stick," she said.

Across the room, the weeping child ingested a bite from the Tupperware and his mother called out triumphantly, "See?"

It was the two of them against Broccoli Mom. That much was clear. They exchanged numbers to seal the alliance.