

# Stitch

by Sarah E. Alderman

Blake is what some, and by some I mean most, of my ex-boyfriends call baggage. That one carry-on that won't fit in the overhead compartment, that one suitcase too many that keeps me grounded. Unable to catch the flight from short-term to long-term relationship. Really though, he is glue holding all my stray, broken pieces together. Really he is so full of precious and essential things that I am unwilling or unable to let go of him. He refuses to answer his phone, preferring the safe medium of email or his answering machine. He only eats pre-cooked, pre-packaged food, only drinks bottled waters, sodas and juices. He has cable, but only watches late-night infomercials and shopping channels. Soon he won't have room to walk freely in his house among the blenders, cookers, food processors and home gym equipment that he will never use. Already it is tight quarters among his boxed-set DVDs, printers, laptops, cameras, various CD collections from the 50's all the way up to the 90's, and anything else that has caught his eye. I have received thirteen necklaces, twelve rings, eight bracelets, several kitchen aids and more earrings than I can count.

The only time he calls me is when there is a package on his door step or he is out of groceries. I eat dinner at his house twice a week, lunch three times a week. Always frozen dinners and single serving desserts. We wash his dishes together, I vacuum what carpet I can, clean his toilets and showers and wash his laundry. Sometimes he paints or sketches me. Sometimes I bring him photographs of flowers, bowls of fruit, gardens, the view from my apartment, random people, the ocean, a river or spring, and he paints them instead. Mostly we sit on the couch watching the home shopping network, our hands side by side, so close our pinkies almost touch. I pretend that I can feel the heat radiating from his hand to mine. This is the closest we get to touching purposely. After the car accident and several surgeries later Blake received a huge lump sum of money. He also stopped leaving his family's home.

Some days are better for him than others; at least I like to think so. I didn't know Blake before the accident. Before the brand new car my father was driving malfunctioned and accelerated wildly, slamming into Blake's father's car. Blake's family was on the way to visit the college he was to attend in the fall. My father and I were on our way to dinner. I dined with my father two nights a week, had lunch with him three times a week. Blake and I, in opposite vehicles, were the only people to survive the crash. I lost my father and gained a lump sum. Blake lost his mother, father, and baby sister, his entire family, everything, and gained an empty family home, a lump sum, and me. I met Blake in the ambulance, I got to know him in the hospital where we recovered.

I stopped asking Blake to leave his house, if only just to walk around the block, to the end of his driveway. So instead we look outside his living room window and watch the outside world. He tells me that too many bad things happen past his front door, that the outside world is a senseless and vicious place, and I know all too well that he is right. Blake is not baggage as much as he is a stitch that holds closed a wound that if opened would never stop bleeding. So instead of me dating seriously, or him leaving his home, we eat our microwave meals in front of the TV and I convince him that I can out-vacuum the Roomba any day.

