

*From the title essay, "Eye of My Heart", by Barbara Graham*

Two o'clock on a Monday afternoon. I'm on deadline, but instead of writing I check my e-mail every two seconds. Then I stare at the phone for a while, as if I can somehow shame it into ringing. But nobody's calling, and the only e-mails coming through on this sticky August day are from the VitaminShoppe and somebody called Magicklady who wants to read my tarot cards.

I feel like I'm back in high school waiting to hear from The Guy—a desperate love slave longing for a sign. But this time the object of my devotion isn't some dark-eyed bad boy; it's my baby granddaughter, Isabelle Eva. And the guy I'm dying to hear from is her father, my son and only child, Clay.

I am fifty-eight-years old. I've been a grandmother for twelve days. I'm stunned by the swell of feeling: not the love part, which I expected, but the urgency, the hunger to hold Isabelle, to feel her body—her spine and ribs as delicate as twigs, her heartbeat as fluttery as a hummingbird's—next to mine. This is love beyond reason and I'm fuzzy on protocol. I don't know where I belong in the new order. In fact, no one seems to know how the pieces of the expanded family puzzle fit together—neither Clay nor his wife, Tamar; not Hugh, my husband and the baby's stepgrandfather; not the rest of the grandparents. We're as clueless as a bunch of earthlings who go to sleep in their own beds and wake up on the moon.

One thing is certain—we've entered a new phase. First there was the worry over the birth (an eleventh-hour C-section) and the health of mother and baby (perfect). This gave way to awe—heart-stopping breathless wonder. One moment she wasn't; then she *was*. Isabelle Eva. This impossibly fragile yet lusty creature who is blood of my blood and more than my blood. Her parents have been generous in sharing her: Hugh and I each got to hold her soon after she was born and often in the days that followed.

My role then was clear. I was part of the support team on call during the days leading up to and following Isabelle's birth. And since I'm the only grandmother who lives in the same city—Washington, D.C.—I also took on the role of chief caterer. Ours is a food-obsessed family that prizes—actually, demands—good cooking, even in the most extreme situations. While Tamar struggled through labor, Clay, a food photographer, *required* a pizza margherita from 2 Amys—the best in town. Still, after two weeks of whipping up one culinary triumph after another, then delivering them to Clay and Tamar, I need to get out of the kitchen. And since my motives haven't been entirely pure, it's time to find out how I fit in when I'm not playing top chef.

Even more important, Clay and Tamar need room to find their own way. A few days before Tamar's parents went home to San Francisco, Clay whispered to me over the phone: "It's nice to have grandparents around, but we're ready to be on our own with our baby." Though he was ostensibly referring to his in-laws, I knew his comments were directed at me. *Our baby—not yours.*

It strikes me that not only was a new baby born twelve days ago, but a new family as well: *their* family. The transition from childless couple to family of three has solidified them as a separate unit in a way that marriage alone did not. In the eight years since Clay and Tamar

married, my exceptionally deep bond with my son has stretched yet remained strong. But this new chapter, though natural and appropriate, feels different. What shocks me the most is that in the midst of my joy over Isabelle, faint traces of loss waft in and out of my consciousness like secondhand smoke.

I wonder if I would feel the same way if I were the mother of the new mother instead of the new father. Would I be granted easier access? As it is, Tamar seems less threatened by me than Clay does by Tamar. During one of our suppers, he confided to me his sadness that he's unable to comfort the baby the way Tamar—with her free-flowing supply of breast milk in a body that is Isabelle's home port—can.

So when Hugh tells me to pay attention to what Clay is saying and “dial it back,” I know he's right. Besides, viewed through a wider lens, I'm incredibly fortunate: Clay and Tamar decided (with no prompting from me, I swear) to move from Paris to Washington in order to live near us when the baby was born. After staying with us for a couple of months, they bought a house a mile from ours. One mile! I was thrilled and touched beyond imagining. Though we've traveled together for weeks at a time, the four of us haven't lived in the same city in nearly twenty years. This is my dream come true—and with a *baby*. Hugh is right. I need to dial it back and let go—the cardinal message of the Buddhist meditation I've been practicing for decades. What do I have to be so anxious and insecure about anyhow? (Hint: plenty, but I don't know that yet.)