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## Better Safe Than Sorry

by Richard Lewis

Gena cowered in the corner, afraid to move, her breathing slowed to a murmur. The twelve-year-old thought, 'oh my god, she's drunk again'.

Her mother stood on teetering heels, swaying like a willow. Wine fell from the rim of her glass to the bare stone floor, as if the very life was leaking out of her. Her cigarette was almost down to the filter, scorching her fingers. She lurched for the ashtray and stumbled, the glass slipping from her hand.

Gena watched the scene unfolding like slo mo video, and a jolt of horror gripped her. The glass shattering, flooding the tiles with silver shards and scarlet liquid.

"Well don't just sit there, clean it up, lazy little bitch," her mother shrieked, face contorting into an ugly sneer.

Gena scuttled to the kitchen to fetch the dustpan and brush, ducking to avoid her mother's cruel hand.

The following morning her mother was overcome with guilt.

"I'm sorry darling, I didn't mean it, it wasn't your fault, I'll make it up to you," she pleaded.

Gena had heard it all before, bearing witness to her parents' endless rows, being abused and let down. Her father, a dark skinned, excitable Italian was also no stranger to the bottle, famous for the number of pints he could put away at the Laughing Dog.

He was prone to making extravagant promises to Gena and her brother to bolster his fragile self-esteem. Only to later renege on them.

This toxic combination made Gena highly distrustful of people. Her parents' distorted view having contaminated her inner world.

When she was sixteen, her mother left without a word, ending up in London, where her alcoholic journey spiralled down to a shadowy, homeless existence.

Gena never saw her mother again.

The smiling mask she wore, camouflaged the pain she felt inside.

She was well-liked by friends but struggled with close relationships and could be irrational when her security was threatened.

When Gena was nineteen, she met Taylor, a sensitive and dependable twenty three year old who was nothing like her family. The relationship seemed to go well for the first six months but he was starting to have second thoughts, seeing how unreasonable she was becoming, obsessively checking the front door and constantly on the lookout for his imagined wandering eye. When challenged, Gena would say, "sometimes obsessions are the only things that matter, better safe than sorry."

Just as Taylor was about to announce the relationship was over, she told him she was pregnant. She'd been on the pill but had become careless. For Gena, a termination was unthinkable.

Not one to shirk his responsibilities, Taylor felt trapped.

He couldn't bear the thought of not being a fulltime father to his child, yet equally knew that living together would be impossible.