

UNBORN

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She was the first one who returned her baby to The Storks. Not knowing if a stork could understand a human language, she begged and cried that it wasn't her fault and she didn't want a baby. The stork tilted its head without putting a baby basket on the ground, looking puzzled. The baby was still asleep, so she sobbed through a closed mouth, too afraid of waking it up. They stared at each other in such stillness until the bird started to flap its wings and wrap them around her. It stepped backwards after a hug and took off to the brightening sky with the baby. What a sad look, she thought vacantly while standing in the dawn. It took a deep, quivering sigh to collect herself and head back home.

She lay on the bed and let her mind wander. Then she got lost in the baby's face, which she had glimpsed accidentally when hugged. Instantly, she knew it was a girl and started to recall all the girls' names she had heard, the names which carried the lives that the baby might have had. So where did it go? She lingered on that question to sleep with a quiet weep. She couldn't dream.

The neighbours came to her the next morning: those who firmly believed in their good intention. It almost made her laugh.

'Where is the baby?'

'The stork took it – her – back with it. It was a girl.'

She stared at one man in the crowd. He was hiding, looking away, and soon disappeared. She also wanted to evaporate but everyone's eyes were on her, glowing with mixed emotions: sympathy, disgust, and curiosity. She swallowed a sharp, angry rant, tasting blood on her tongue, and instead quietly watched the

stories slowly spread from mouth to mouth, over the woods, across the ocean. Only her name was spoken, written, and carved; no one asked the father's name, so she swallowed it too. Now, after so many people and questions have passed by her life, she sits in the familiar silence and wonders: Where did she go?