

Really?

“Another one, really?” Kevin groaned.

He closed his eyes and sighed.

He was standing in the kitchen of the one bedroom apartment he shared with his wife, Leilani. On the counter lay a pile of recently retrieved mail, in the only section not occupied by dirty dishes.

He had just withdrawn the one envelope from the stack that particularly interested him.

“Family Obstetric Associates” read the address line. He knew what that meant. *Yep*, he thought. *Another bill*. He hurriedly ripped it open and extracted the one page summary of charges.

“Well baby, it’s another \$150” he said, sighing again.

His wife, Leilani, sat in the living room on the couch. She was using her laptop to complete their online grocery order.

“Really?” she asked with exasperation. “I thought we’d already met our deductible?”

“So did I,” Kevin replied. *Why do they always send paper bills, and why are they always for an appointment that happened 3 months ago?* He asked himself. *Do they not have the internet or something?* “I guess it’s because we had ‘not paid our deductible at the time of service’ or something like that,” he added, quoting from the conversation he’d shared with the billing representative several months prior.

Kevin placed his lunch box and coffee mug next to the stack of mail on the counter, and joined his wife in the living room on the couch. He leaned back and closed his eyes. He was so tired. Another night of mediocre sleep. Another day of barely keeping his eyes open while staring at a computer screen. Another multiple cups of coffee that never helped very much when he was at work, but always managed to kick in right around bedtime.

“Oh, baby,” said Leilani. “I’ve got some news you’re not going to like.

Kevin’s heart rate quickly accelerated. “What?” he asked, turning his head to face her.

“Honda called.”

Kevin closed his eyes again.

“Really?”

“Turns out there’s some more maintenance I need to get done. My front and rear differentials. And the fuel injection.”

“How much?”

“They told me \$700.”

Kevin exhaled sharply and leaned his head back on the couch again. He closed his eyes.

“Sorry,” said Leilani.

Kevin placed his hand gently on her shoulder. “Naw, baby, it’s okay. Better we get it done now while you’re still working.”

Leilani nodded and continued with the grocery order. Kevin got up and walked down the little hallway to their bathroom. Once inside, he stared at himself in the mirror.

These days, every time he beheld his appearance in the mirror, he experienced a fresh sensation of both horror and revulsion at the deep bags that were forming under his eyes. *Like a friggin raccoon* he thought. And then there was the growing collection of gray hairs that had accumulated on his chin. *If I’m this tired now, what will I be like in a month and a half?* He wondered grimly, almost shuddering.

Only a month and a half away. He didn’t want to think about that right now.

Kevin closed his eyes, and ran his hands through his hair. *Another \$700? Really?* He thought. Everytime they thought they were going to have a break, it was something else. Another car repair. Another medical bill. Another household item that needed to be replaced. Every month it was something. Like the medical labs that Leilani had done back in March. They’d been charged \$600 for the first one and \$300 for the second one. *Isn’t there some kind of “no surprises” law against that kind of stuff?* Kevin grumbled to himself.

And then there had been in his own car, just a few months ago.

He’d taken it in for routine maintenance - oil change, tire rotation, the normal express service sort of stuff. And he’d mentioned his windshield wipers hadn’t been working the best. How bad could it be?

Turns out they had needed to replace the windshield wiper motor - \$1250. *Not the car motor. The WINDSHIELD WIPER motor.* Kevin still remembered the way he’d felt when he heard the news. If there’s anything that would make a grown man cry, that would be it - \$1250, \$1250 for a car part the size of his fist that makes little pieces of rubber go back and forth across glass. They were still paying that one off. *Really? \$1250?*

Kevin walked back into the living room and sat down next to Leilani on the couch. This time, he kicked off his shoes, swung his legs up onto the left couch arm, and leaned his head back onto Leilani's leg. She placed a hand on his chest, while using the other hand to finish the grocery order.

"You okay baby?" asked Leilani, brow furrowed in concern.

"Yeah," Kevin replied, closing his eyes and placing his forearm over his face to block the light from the nearby lamp. "It just all feels like a lot."

"Yeah," sighed Leilani. "Yeah it does."

He lay there for several moments. What if he could fall asleep for a little bit? That might keep him up that night though. Or he might just not be able to sleep anyway. Like usual.

"Oh baby, unfortunately this week's order is going to be a little higher," said Leilani, as she wrapped up on the online grocery order. "I had to get more prenats."

Kevin nodded, his eyes still closed. He was all for prenatal vitamins. He just didn't understand why a bottle of little colorful gummies somehow managed to cost \$20. Increasingly, \$20 seemed to be the base price for most items you purchased at the grocery store.

Leilani set the laptop down on the coffee table. "You doing okay?" she asked again. Her right hand still rested on his chest.

"Yeah, I'm okay," Kevin replied.

Both Kevin and Leilani had good jobs, and between the two of them, they were making more money than they ever had. Why did it sometimes feel like they were barely breaking even? He would have hoped they had saved more by now, but so many unforeseen expenses had come up over the past few months. And in about a month and a half, Leilani was going to stop working. Kevin wanted that for her; he wanted that for her so bad. He'd rather have her at home than have half her salary go to paying for child care. But could they survive? And he knew she'd wanted to go back to Georgia to visit her family at some point in the next year. Kevin almost laughed about the fact that they had both attended a first time homebuyers class a few weeks ago. He and Leilani, buying a home? Anymore, the going price for a modest three bedroom, 1000 square foot home was at least \$500k. Maybe in another decade they could do it. Of course, by then AI would probably have taken away everybody's jobs . . .

"Baby! Did you feel that?" asked Leilani excitedly, pressing her hand to her stomach.

Kevin emerged from his reverie and looked up at his wife. "Was that her?"

“Uh huh,” replied Leilani. A delighted grin had spread across her face. “She was kicking you in the head.”

“I didn’t feel anything.” Kevin climbed down off the couch and knelt down on the floor in front of Leilani, with his head near her belly button. “Maybe if I sing, she’ll do it again.”

He started to sing, a lullaby he had heard maybe a decade ago.

There’s a lot of love for you in my heart . . .

Kevin felt Leilani run her hand through his hair and down the back of his neck. Before, he had never really liked her touching his hair; it always felt weird. But several months ago, when he had started singing to her belly, he realized he loved it.

There’s a lot of love for you in my heart . . .

Kevin kept singing, and Leilani rested her hand on his shoulder.

In my heart, in my heart . . .

Kevin thought about all the generosity people had shown them. Two baby showers. People offering to babysit. Leilani’s mom had bought them two car seats. Kevin’s mom sent them money every month by Zelle and always asked if they needed more. Maybe they would be okay.

There’s a lot of love for you in my heart.

And then he felt it. A tiny little pummel right around his cheek.

“Was that one?” Kevin gasped. Leilani nodded.

“Really?” Kevin asked again, uncertain.

Leilani nodded again. Really.