It looks like I’m the last one to arrive, but it’s okay because all the other couples are waiting in the hallway. Some of the husbands have huddled together while some of the wives are comparing bellies and swollen ankles. The less social members of the group sit patiently against the wall or in one of the few plastic chairs that sparsely line the narrow hallway. One of the guys chatting basketball notices me and nods in acknowledgement, but then frowns at the odd absence of my husband. Whit was definitely the social one, it being his idea to take a new parents cooking class in the first place. I haven’t even memorized one of these people’s names. The women ignore me, not seeming to care at all about what’s inside my belly. I’m a whale in a school of dolphins.

“Cooking with Kids, for Kids” has run over, but only those that sit silently seem to mind the inconvenience. I deliberately took my time at the store hunting down my ingredients for our final class, hoping to show up while everyone else was well into setting up for the night. Instead their red and green and blue cloth reusable bags mock me as I stand alone at the entrance of the corridor, gripping the rings of my plastic grocery bag so tightly that moisture is growing on my palms. As I readjust my grip on the bag, our classroom opens up and children around seven and eight year’s spill out like loose gumballs. Their full sprints are funneled by the narrow hallway, but I can tell once they hit the door at the end they will disperse in all directions, none of them with a destination any more determined than simply outside. I have no idea why a class called “Baking for the One in the Oven” follows a kids cooking class. It seems they’ve misconceived the concept of natural order.

Once the main gaggle of mothers from the kids class shuffle down the hall I stay put and let my peers filter into the room two by two. This is the first time I’ve been without a mate in years. Talk about screwing up the natural order of things. Our instructor is coming down the hall from the opposite end of the building, a fresh soda from the lobby’s machine being pried open by her fat middle finger. I’m sure it’s been a battle losing weight after four children in eight years, but I can’t help but smile at the irony of having an overweight teacher for a baking class. She finishes slurping cola from the top of the can as we meet at the doorway. She waves me to go in ahead of her. How nice.

As the others start setting up at the tall, science lab-like tables that are laid out between two walls of ovens, I make my way to the back of the room, to the far table, exiling myself for my difference. The couples unload their canvas caches; lots of butter, milk, vanilla extract, salt, baking soda, powdered sugar, eggs. I wrestle out my own goods; much of the same, but minus anything sweet. Sweets aren’t really what I’m in the mood for. I’ve wanted biscuits ever since we started this class, and though Whit was fine with the pastries and chickens and pies (oh my!), I’ve always wanted to know how to make biscuits from scratch. With a simple recipe I found
Googling “homemade biscuits” stuffed into the top of my borrowed apron, I set my materials out in front of me, pretending to wait for the teacher’s next instruction. She tells everyone to “calm their palms” (some kind of witticism of hers) while she speaks. I’m not really paying attention to what she’s talking about, something about how we will have a nice treat for working so hard these past six weeks, so I’m startled when I hear, “oh, it looks like we have a solo tonight” come out of her mouth. I nod silently. She announces that that is okay and that she hopes everything is good with Whit. I doubt she even remembers my name.

The class gets underway and the couples get to portioning and mixing. I do the same, though in different order, and when my recipe calls for the dough-ball of my ingredients to be kneaded onto a heavily floured surface, I take great joy in slowly working my hands into the fleshy consistency, letting the butter grease my fingers. When the dough is nice and smooth, I remove my last purchased item, an aluminum biscuit cutter, and cut out ten perfectly round circles. My oven is good and pre-heated at 425 degrees so I surreptitiously slide in the baking tray, completely undetected by the rest of the bakers. I need twelve minutes for it to bake, and no frosting to work on, so I go to the bathroom and force myself to pee.

When I return, the classroom smells like cooking sugar, though as I get closer to my station, I sense a salty, buttery aroma that I hope isn’t getting too strong. I put my apron back on, pick up the bottom half of the fold and try to waft my increasing smell toward the open window, hoping the smells of confection from the other ovens will overpower my buttery aroma, but who am I kidding? Those soft sweets can’t measure up to the wonderful stink of my biscuits baking. I give up on hiding my creation and wait in anticipation for my oven’s timer to buzz. As the rest of the class patiently waits for their own alarms, they huddle in pairs around large plastic mixing bowls, preparing pink and white and brown icing to decorate their incubating creations. I think about how much of a tease it will be when they take out their cakes and have to wait until they get home and the cakes are cooled before they can decorate and eat them.

The instructor, the “master baker” as she refers to herself, sweeps leisurely around the room, eyeing the steady progress. She ignores me and the mess I’ve made and stays in the front half of the class, overseeing the whipping of frosting. I stand motionless with only a few minutes left on my biscuits and think about Whit and how it probably hasn’t even crossed his mind that I’d be here alone and about how much sense it all makes. I notice the instructor sniffing and then she ignores a question from a petite brunette in order to loudly ask, “is somebody baking biscuits?!” Indeed. She’s not a master for nothing, I suppose.