

Decisions Made for Them

Ross and Kathryn had the next few years pretty much figured out. Kathryn was set up at work and willing to stay put, at least while Ross tunnelled his way through his degree. He had at least two years left on the thing, but if the economy held together, he stood to make some decent money when he got out. So the pregnancy came down on them like a wall. They both looked at the little pink polkadot burned into the dipstick by a single drop of Kathryn's pee and felt their minds start to spin free. Here was something that had entered in from some other zone, some other universe.

It was Kathryn who first called the test's accuracy into question. Ross hadn't thought of that.

'It's not a hundred percent?' he asked. He wasn't sure how to sound about this, right now – hopeful, angry. His voice came out too high.

'It can't be right,' Kathryn repeated. She knew it was. But she sent Ross out to the corner to get another kit anyway. It was almost eleven, and the store was closing in ten minutes, and she knew it was pointless, but she sent him. And he went, in a T-shirt and shorts even though it was pissing rain. He bought another kit, and they tried again.

Ross had the walk to the store to calm down a little, so this time he just sat with Kathryn and stared hard at her hands. No trembling, but she was rubbing her thumbs hard into her fingers. He didn't think she wanted him to do anything like put an arm around her or anything.

'Oh fucking hell,' she said, and almost threw the whole thing across the room. She slapped it down on the arm of the couch, instead. It was like she'd been robbed. Or set up, as if someone'd had stuck drugs or something into her suitcase on her way through an airport. She'd been set up. Her own body had set her up, with a little help from Ross.

'I don't get how,' Ross said, picking up the box the new kit had come in. The text on the side of it told him nothing. 'I really don't, I don't know.'

'Is there any way to know how long?' he asked her.

'How long *what?*' Kathryn said, thinking for a second there was something accusatory in his tone. She eased up quickly. 'This is just yes or no,' she said, looking at the dipstick. 'You have to go to a doctor or— oh fuck, Ross, I can't do it. I really can't!'

She cried for nearly half an hour straight, and Ross held her head to his shoulder, trying to be comforting but still feeling the whole time like he was waiting for her to come out of it and say something that would make everything clearer for both of them. Not that she was going to abort it – he couldn't think that far ahead yet. It still wasn't anywhere near a settled reality. It sounded stupid, but what he was waiting for was for her to suddenly sit up and laugh, having remembered something that made the very idea an impossibility, like the fact that she didn't actually have a womb, or that babies can be willed back into dormancy by parents who just aren't ready yet. There was something they were missing somewhere, something they'd overlooked, some detail, and if they started talking about the situation as if it were set in stone then it really would be, and they would have lost their chance to bypass the whole thing.

Kathryn sat up finally and wiped her nose. 'Stop it,' she said when Ross tried to return her gently to his shoulder. 'I don't want that.'

Ross made coffee in the kitchen. He felt like every move he made was suddenly full of new meaning. This is the first pot of coffee he will make as a father. This is the first time he'd looked in the fridge as a father. It was like being high. He wanted to go back outside for a second, but he figured Kathryn would freak if she heard the door go. He ate some red licorice from the cupboard as quietly as he could.

Kathryn sat on the couch with her feet on the coffee table and her knees way up and her hands pressed between her knees. She seemed to be calculating something in her head. She wanted to try something, but she was afraid to. She wanted to sit still and become aware of her entire body, to see if anything felt different. She wanted to do an internal scan for the intruder. Years ago, she used to swear by that kind of thing, body awareness or body meditation or whatever you want to call it. She could put herself to sleep that way. Concentrate on the very tips of her toes until they were fully present in her mind, then moving on up through her feet and legs and the rest, bringing each part into full

consciousness. It was what she always did when she smoked up, just lay flat on the couch or on the bed and did her own mental MRI. People used to think she was a flake or that she couldn't handle the pot. Now, when there was actually a reason to go on a little search within, she wouldn't let her mind relax long enough to try it. She was afraid she would be able to detect the baby in her, like suddenly becoming aware of a face staring back at the other end of a dark room. Her mind was skipping around, throwing up questions she had no ability to process yet, questions that come out of sequence and contradicted each other. Would they have to move? How did it even happen? Boy or girl? Did she really have to have it? She couldn't talk to her doctor about an abortion, whether she wanted to or not. If she did, and then had it anyway, then she'd have to change doctors, because she wouldn't want him ever meeting the child they'd once talked about eliminating, in the same office they'd talked about it. She caught herself hoping she had some kind of physical abnormality that would mean she had to get rid of it. Kathryn started crying again out of shock and guilt, but did it quietly – she didn't want Ross coming back just yet and trying to comfort her. For what she was thinking, she didn't deserve it.

Ross couldn't talk her into going out for a walk, she wouldn't even leave the living room, so they sat in there with the two empty pregnancy-kit boxes and the instructions palmed flat on the coffee table. They'd laughed at the whole thing while getting the first kit ready, making fun of some of the language used in the instructions. Now look at them – the scattered kits were laughing back. Kathryn tried to keep herself in the room with Ross, but she kept sinking down into the couch and away from the walls, and the coffee table with the magazines in the middle, and the solid face of the TV, and the shelves full of books and DVDs. The sound of the rain and traffic outside seemed louder than her own voice. There was cotton in her ears, it felt like.

Ross wasn't saying anything. Until they started talking about it, he thought, they were both still in some in-between space between not having a baby and having one, between laughing at the pregnancy test and accepting that she was pregnant. He wanted to stay there as long as possible. Kathryn took a few small sips of her coffee and left the rest to go cold in the cup.

'It was raining even harder when I went out,' Ross said. Kathryn looked at him as if he'd just told some totally inappropriate joke. He tried again.

'Do you want me to make you something to eat? Some toast?'

‘No, I’m fine. I can’t eat anything.’

Eventually she let him make her some buttered toast, and she followed him into the kitchen with a question:

‘What are we going to do?’

And so the baby dropped into existence, and they started talking about it. Neither of them knew what it meant in real terms, what anything cost. If they went ahead with the baby they’d be the first in either of their families to have one. Kathryn’s older sister had been talking about it for years and done nothing. Ross’s brother was younger than him and played in bands and would probably never have kids, though he had once hinted to Ross that he’d got some girl pregnant by accident, someone he hardly knew whose family lived in the States. Ross tried to remember if he’d ever heard anything else about it. Knowing that his brother had knocked someone up at a party and done nothing about would set a kind of minimum standard of behavior against which whatever he and Kathryn did could only look good.

Kathryn said she was going to bed early, which surprised Ross – he figured they were going to be up late talking about it. She started a shower for herself, but turned it off after sitting on the toilet with the seat down for ten minutes, watching the thin ghosts of steam move through the room and blur the mirror. Ross checked his email. His professor had answered some of the questions he’d sent earlier, and he was tempted to open his fat, sluggish thesis and do some work until his eyes got too tired. But Kathryn came out of the bathroom with her hair still dry and crying silently in deep shrugs, so he helped her to bed, and, after putting his computer back to sleep without regret, got undressed and climbed in with her.

‘I feel like such shit,’ she said after a while.

‘I know,’ he said. When he realized this probably wasn’t enough, he added: ‘Me too. I can’t even think.’

They watched the light of the streetlight on the wall, shaped like a blade by the crack in the curtains, and fell asleep into twinned dreams of children and fear.

Kathryn told no one at work the next day, or the day after, and made it right to the weekend without even calling her mother. She felt like she was hiding something under her jacket, something alive. The whole time she sat at her desk she felt fragile, as if her phone only had to ring at the wrong time to start her throwing up all over herself. There was a big

Trinidadian woman in her office named Sara who had three kids and who sometimes boasted about having predicted the sex of all her friends' babies before they'd been born, just from holding the pregnant women's hands and looking into their eyes. She didn't believe Sara had any kind of intuitive powers, but even still she stayed away from the woman for a while, making sure they were never alone together in the lunch room or at the copier.

At first she didn't tell anybody out of shock and the slim possibility she might not have it. After a few days, however, she started feeling a small glow of excitement that she wasn't quite ready to disperse by making an announcement. Every night she and Ross would sit in their living room with the TV muted, trying to give their new reality some kind of shape. Eventually, Ross would get too jumpy to sit, and the two of them would walk down to the park and then along a bike path. Every few minutes there'd be an angry *ping!*, and they'd have to jump to the side to let a hunched-over shape whirr past them.

'Assholes and their fucking bikes,' Ross said. He trashed the whole idea of bike-riding for a while. Kathryn just waited til he was finished.

'We should just cut through here,' she suggested, pointing through the trees back to their neighbourhood.

'Are you tired?'

'Little bit.'

'You think it's... Are you feeling anything?' Ross asked her. His tone was more probing than sympathetic. Unbelievably – even to himself – he was still on the lookout for signs that the whole thing was a false alarm, a hoax.

Ross knew instinctively that many of the big decisions they had before them were really Kathryn's to make, and he could sense – though she kept insisting she was still as lost as he was – that she had already started to make some of them, however unconsciously. He had no idea what they were supposed to do, but he resented the idea of his having very little say in what happens next, so he kept trying a kind of passive resistance while they spoke, letting himself go limp and useless and forcing her to drag him forward to the next stage in their discussion. Ross had thought he was coming to terms with the whole thing. He'd been intentionally looking at babies on the street, looking into their faces for as long as he could get away with without the parents noticing. But he was slipping back. He was getting angrier and angrier about the fact that he couldn't bring up the idea of not having it. It was all her

decision. Bullshit: It was his, too. Okay if she doesn't want to go have it done in the end, but to not even talk about it... And he'd be an asshole if he even hinted.

They sat across from each other at the table in their kitchen and tried to be formal. They weren't getting anywhere just wandering around aimlessly, circling the issue in wide and irregular orbits. Kathryn broke everything into loose categories like Money, Work, Timing, Living Arrangements, and the like. She simply couldn't chew on anything bigger just yet. She was uncomfortable doing it – it sounded so cold – but Ross wasn't being much of a help, and it was the only way she could keep her mind straight.

'So, first thing, big question: Do we need to be looking for a bigger place?'

'We have no chance of getting anything better. Zero.'

'What if we turned your office into the baby's room? I know that's shitty, but.'

'It's not shitty. Actually, it *is* shitty, but whatever.'

'It's the only room we can do it. Our bedroom's not big enough.'

'Everything's too small.'

Kathryn tried not to get angry at him, but she could almost hear doors closing around her, possibilities being cut off. She was shutting a lot of them herself. She felt at herself in the morning, around her stomach, to see if she could detect any hardening or expansion. She got quieter and brooded a lot at home. At work she made sure she was always on the phone when somebody came around to her desk. She ate her lunch in front of her computer and walked home sometimes instead of taking the subway. Until she started telling people about the baby she would be silent. Her mother called and left a message around then, but Kathryn never replied. The baby inside her was made of gas – it would escape out her mouth if she spoke about it before she was sure.

The turn came one night when Ross fell asleep before her, and she lay awake following the progress of their neighbours as they moved from room to room on the other side of the bedroom wall. There was butter-coloured light coming from somewhere in the apartment but she couldn't be bothered to get up. Something bubbled in Ross's throat, and he coughed once into the pillow without waking. They were clumped close together on the bed, with the blanket hitched up slightly on her side to free her feet, which were sore. She thought about the little knot of tissue inside her, flexing and expanding into a human. She was aware of someone else in the room, and instantly she felt the two of them, herself and Ross, extend out beyond themselves, out into their rooms and through the walls and into

every crack like a quick-moving fog or a stream of light that had no single source. Up to that moment they'd been discrete bodies, taking pleasure in each other, allowing affection and familiarity to bind them loosely, but staying sealed within their casings. It was the exact opposite of the inner space she used to be so obsessed with – they had leaked out of themselves and mingled, she knew it.

Kathryn made one attempt, weeks later, to tell Ross about the feeling, and he made some joke about using The Force, but she knew he felt something like it, too, some new awareness of becoming more than just two adults and a baby. Some new energy was being brought into being, some force (now she laughed and cursed Ross, but she was serious) being thrown off them like the electrical field that hums invisibly around a long row of power lines. From now on they were no longer a couple but an idea: a Family. And as such, they had to get their shit together.

She'd felt so exposed for a couple of days, as if she'd woken up out in the open somewhere, but now it was as if a dome were closing, way up over her head. Anybody left outside the dome when it closed would be left outside for good, including Ross. She must be larger now, a city-state. She had authority. Inside her something was forming that was hard and sharp. She could feel herself growing cruel, though she resisted it as much as she could.

'I'm going to call my mother,' she told Ross.

'Sure,' he replied, not realizing at first the significance of what she was saying.

'Wait, what are you going to tell her? Are you telling her anything?'

'I'm gonna tell her I'm it, I'm pregnant.'

She said it as firmly and decisively as she could, but as soon as the words were out of her mouth, her face fell apart and she started to cry. Ross almost jumped out of his chair to hold her. He tried to bind her up in a cocoon of his arms, but in his mind he was alone, facing one thought: *so that's it*. It came to him with a lot less anger than he'd been expecting. The baby was here, the baby was his. He had stepped, or been pushed, through a door.

'Is that okay?'

She wasn't really asking for his permission, but to see what he was thinking.

'If that's what you're doing, that's.'

'I need to tell her.'

'I know, I'm just.'

'Want me to wait?'

Ross retreated to ask himself a question, one he couldn't face before: *how bad would this be?* He tried to picture himself with a kid – not a baby, which he couldn't even visualize, but with child of four or five walking next to him somewhere, looking at him, knowing him as his *father*. It was impossible. He held on to her, but stared at the kitchen floor, trying to see through it to the information he was lacking, the answer. He stood very still as if no longer sure he was in complete control of his body, or could predict his next move.

Kathryn felt herself rising up within the clutch of Ross's arms. She kept feeling better and better, washed through with the antidote of certainty. To tell Ross had been to tell herself. She didn't need to visualize herself with a baby – there was nothing her mind could do at this point, her body was taking over and moving forward, creating and preparing. She thought of the women working in the basement kitchens of the church at weddings and funerals she'd gone to. She'd seen them because she would sneak away, bored, to play on the stairs or swing in and out of the bathroom doors, chased by her cousins. For everyone else, the food would just be there, waiting, when all the rest was done. She'd been pregnant for a couple of weeks now, at least, but only now did the process really begin. Everything before them tilted down.

Kathryn called her mother, and they both cried, and within days she was there, holding her daughter in the front hallway of the apartment. Her mother slept on the futon in the living room and, for once, didn't complain about what it did to her back. Ross put off calling his parents until the morning Kathryn's mother arrived. He called his mother first; she never changed her tone from one of surprise, as if she'd forgotten that joy was involved. She left large gaps in the conversation that Ross knew were where the more uncomfortable questions were supposed to go. Questions like, *are you sure you are ready for this?*, which Ross didn't have an answer to. Ross's father, out in Calgary, sounded happier and more congratulatory, perhaps because he knew none of it had anything to do with him.

'Hey! Way to go!'

'Thanks, Dad.'

'Got a name?'

'We just found out like a couple of days ago.'

'Well, whatever – that's great news. Where are you with your degree?'

Kathryn's mother tried to make them promise to find a bigger apartment, maybe even a house they could rent.

‘There’s nothing like that, here, mom. It’s all way too expensive.’

‘I wish I had some money I could give you for a house. Your father spent all of it didn’t he. Wouldn’t save a penny. Now look. He would have loved this, Kathryn, he never said anything – you know what he’s like – but he would have loved a little baby. But you could always move near me – there’s lot of houses there you could afford.’

‘And you could work in the casino,’ Ross said to Kathryn. She smiled, but didn’t laugh.

Kathryn finally told people at work, and they all did a little scream. Sara screamed, too, and went off to tell some more people upstairs. Plans were made for a baby shower, which Kathryn kept trying to beg off or at least keep within reasonable bounds. The only two women in the office with kids appeared and gave her a hug. One of them she’d been fighting with just a couple of weeks prior over some accounts. Kathryn didn’t yet feel any sense of sorority, but she willingly buried the hatchet. Sara promised to make her something for her lunch the next day, but still didn’t try a prediction. When everyone went back to their desks, she found she didn’t want to be there anymore – she wanted to turn off her computer and put everything from her desk in a box and go home to be a mother. She hadn’t felt that way when she came in that morning.

‘How’re you feeling?’ Ross had been asking Kathryn this question every night when she got home, but now she was asking him. She’d gone to see her doctor – everything was fine so far, she was about a month-and-a-half along. His nurse had come in to give her a little hug, then started crying uncontrollably and had to leave the room. ‘That’s just...’ her doctor said, but never finished the sentence. She was out front when Kathryn left, and apologized. When Kathryn told Ross about what had happened, he said, ‘She must have lost one or something. Was she ever pregnant when you were there?’

Kathryn felt high after the appointment. She didn’t think there was any way to make it more real and official, but there it was, on the paper the doctor had given her: pregnant. She was knocked up. One hundred percent.

‘How’re you feeling?’ she asked Ross. He’d been so helpful and sweet at first, but now he was slumping around as if trying to make her feel guilty about the whole thing.

‘Fine. I’m just—’ He shrugged.

Ross would have to find something part-time. He’d been picking things up at school, but needed something steadier.

‘My school schedule is so fucked, what job is there?’

‘I know this is a big deal, and it’s shitty just the idea, but what about if you took a year off and then finished it after that? It just might be easier. I don’t know how easy it would be to go to school with a baby around. I don’t know.’

Ross had been expecting that. He didn’t resent Kathryn for suggesting it – he’d been thinking he’d have to do that, anyway. He did feel resentful, however, and looked around for someone or something to focus it on. He knew he didn’t want to start resenting the baby before it had even been born. He was pretty sure he was happy about the baby.

Ross and Kathryn started planning in earnest, acting as if the baby were a coming hurricane. As if they were about to start taping X’s on the windows and collecting cans and water in the basement. They drew up list after list of things they would need, things they could use if they could afford it, things they could do without, things they had to get done in the next six or seven months, while Kathryn was still mobile. They walked through their apartment, willing their rooms to be larger, those cramped little cells. If they got rid of some of their furniture they could just do it, at least until the baby was two or three.

‘Fuck, I wish we had a house,’ Kathryn said.

‘Yeah right. A million dollars, here we go.’

‘How are people supposed to have kids?’

The next few weeks were hot; they slept with the windows open. They both woke up after midnight when someone smashed something on the sidewalk and started hooting. Ross tried to see out, but the tree was in the way. They listened to the laughter and footsteps die out and get swallowed by the sound of cars passing. Kathryn reached out to put her arm around him, and laughed when it came down on his bare chest. She didn’t know he had taken off his shirt. He flinched.

‘Your arm’s cold!’

They pulled together. Kathryn put her hand into his pajamas, and Ross fought to get her T-shirt over her head without pulling her ear off. It was a shock to both of them how much they wanted this. They heard something else hit the sidewalk and didn’t stop. They didn’t stop when they both came – close enough together to count as simultaneous. They kept going, as if there were something else behind it, something that had previously sat on

the surface of their skin and was easily accessible, but now had to be furiously dug out. They fell back asleep with the covers in a mess on the floor and their legs twined at the knee.

Ross sent Kathryn emails throughout the day, messages with only two words – ‘Boy: Harrison?’ or ‘Girl: Henrietta?’ Kathryn ignored them for a while before responding with, ‘What if it’s both? Sam?’

Her phone rang within minutes.

‘That’s not funny.’

Kathryn felt the baby’s presence on the subway in to work. The train slowed to a stop in between stations. When he shook and creaked and started forward again, she felt a sharp cramping below her stomach. She was a little dizzy and thought she might have to pee. She got off at the next station, sat on a bench, and let a few trains go by before she felt confident enough to board one and keep going. At work she drank a giant glass of water from the cooler, and almost immediately had to go the bathroom.

‘It must be moving around or something. It’s definitely there. He. Or she, I guess.’

‘Can it really move around already?’

Ross was morbidly curious; he stared at Kathryn’s belly while she sat eating from a can of oversalted cashews. She was pushing them in her mouth, one after another. She looked like she was going to finish the whole thing in one sitting. Ross stared hard and tried to imagine a living creature in there, something with a bloodied, crumpled face that was a strange combination of his and hers. It was right there in the room with them; he couldn’t believe it. He’d been thinking of the baby as something that, in eight months or so, would arrive like an assassin who had packed his lethal suitcase and checked out of his non-descript hotel at the moment of conception, and was now making his slow way across the country toward them. But of course it was there now, and it would be there the whole time. It would witness everything they said and did from now on. Ross just couldn’t believe it – he was already a father, and yet, for him, absolutely nothing had changed. He hadn’t even tried to make a decision about school and work. Kathryn was sitting there eating nuts. She went to work every morning and at night came home and ate dinner with Ross. She watched TV, she went to the store, she talked on the phone, she did long searches on the Internet, and the whole time there was something growing within her. Ross really couldn’t believe it. It was alive.

Kathryn felt nothing for a while except a vague wooziness or vertigo that seemed to come on whenever she was walking or standing for a long time. It was too early for that, she thought. She imagined she could feel a slight tightening just above her pelvis, but wasn't sure. Her doctor said nothing like that was happening just yet. She'd puked first thing in the morning only a couple of times, so she was hoping she was one of the lucky ones who mostly avoided all of that. Other than nuts and candy, she didn't notice anything in particular she wanted to eat all the time. Her mother told her to drink as much milk as she could stand right now, as she might get sick at the sight of later on.

'That's bone juice for the baby, you know,' she said. 'It's like glue he's using to build himself up.'

She sent them packages full of little hats and socks and blankets, all of them white or pale blue (she wanted a grandson), and all as soft as down. Ross's brother came by for dinner and brought an econo-pak of diapers. He held it above his head like a trophy when he came in the door.

'Here you go, dude! Get used to it.'

'That's like size four!' Kathryn said. Ross's brother looked at the package.

'So what?'

'So he won't need those till he's maybe two!'

'Oh whatever! Maybe he'll be a big kid. Just hang on to them, they don't rot.'

After dinner, Kathryn lay down in the bedroom, and Ross and his brother drank beer in the kitchen.

'It's cool, you know,' his brother said. 'I think this is really cool.'

'Yeah?'

'You don't?'

'I do, I'm just still kind of weirded out. Not weirded out, just... it's like, everything's been totally turned around, you know? Something just took the wheel, and—' Ross spun his hands. '—like that. Just totally changed direction.'

'I still think it's cool. I saw these wicked little baby guitars, they're like *this* big. With flames. I'm totally going to get you one.'

Kathryn became wary of the subway. She started leaving the apartment early to go the whole way by streetcar. She hadn't felt sick for a week, and it didn't feel like someone had been twisting her nipples all night anymore, but she was still cramping up tight

whenever she walked a lot or got nervous. It was like the baby was stretching out his arms and legs, trying to make more room. Could he even use his arms and legs yet? She knew from Google that he had them by now. His head was already large and translucent. A little troll, curled up under his bridge. Her next doctor's appointment was in two weeks. The first serious one, where he'd talk about food and stages, and probably put a finger into her and look around. She was impatient to ask him again about the cramps – they seemed to be getting sharper – but she was enjoying this period, where she knew she was pregnant, but didn't have to start acting according to any plan. The two-week wait for her first real appointment gave her a reprieve from responsibility. She felt like she was out in the country, with no doctors around. One train every two weeks. The baby was hers alone for a little while longer, rather than a joint project between herself and Dr. Munder, with Ross acting as outside support.

She tried to think about work, about her future there, but couldn't. She didn't yet have a date, so she couldn't book her leave, but she'd already gone to see her boss about it. The woman, who was not the woman who had hired Kathryn, and whom no one in the office really knew much about, had been friendly but tight, pointedly not getting up to hug Kathryn as everyone else had been doing, and telling her to get a letter from her doctor, just so it was all official. She made it clear she didn't really want to discuss leave until she had the letter in hand.

'Does she think you're lying?' Angie in the next desk over asked Kathryn.

'That's weird,' Ross said. 'Do they always need that?'

'She didn't even hug me or get excited or anything,' Kathryn said. 'Not that I was looking for that at all, it's just, like, you'd think there'd be *something*.'

'Maybe she's jealous.'

A few days later, Kathryn almost had to call in sick. She'd been waking up throughout the night with cramps that cut into her with short blades. When she was able to sleep she dreamed that her baby had teeth, long and sharp. There was some blood in the bed. Ross spotted it. She came back from the bathroom, and he had the blankets stripped off the bed, and was standing there with the corner of one sheet in his hand, looking at the bare mattress in confusion as if he were a magician surprised to see a trick work.

'Is that from you?' he asked, pointing at the small archipelago of blood on her side.

Kathryn looked closely at the stains, then went back to the bathroom to check herself. This kind of thing was normal, Dr Munder had told her, but she couldn't take a breath until she got inside and shut the door behind her. She stayed in there for a half an hour. Every few minutes, Ross came to the door and asked, 'How's it going?' Finally, he gave the door a knock and said, 'I *really* have to shit. Sorry.' Her face was white when she came out, but it didn't look like she'd been crying. Ross tried to get her to stay home and call the doctor, but the cramps were mostly gone, and she had a ton of stuff waiting for her on her desk.

'I just got scared and freaked a little,' she said. 'I think it's fine now. I don't want to start getting all weird – I've got eight months of this.' She tried to laugh.

That evening the cramps came back when she was walking up from the bus stop. On her lunch hour she'd locked herself into one of the bathroom stalls to check her underwear – a few spots, but nothing serious. She could feel there was more there now, the fabric was damp against her. Ross was at school to talk to his advisor about maybe getting more work on campus, so she went straight to the bedroom and lay down. It was too late for a nap, but she needed to get off her feet for a few minutes. Ross found her there almost two hours later. His sudden presence in the darkening room was a shock. The light from outside was red and harsh. The whole room looked like it was in a state of emergency.

The cramps were still there. Ross again tried to convince her to see Dr Munder.

'His office is closed,' she said. Her head was still soupy from the unexpected sleep. She felt as though she were still getting over a secret she'd been told in her sleep. She was between worlds. 'If it's still going on tomorrow then I'll maybe call for an appointment. I just really don't want to run in there every time I get a little sick or something. My Aunt Joanne was like that – she'd get hysterical and start calling my mother every time she felt sick. I remember her coming over all the time and wanting my mother to go with her to the clinic. I swear that's why my cousins are so fucked up.'

'Yeah, but blood? That's not normal is it?'

'It is, actually. I just think my body's not ready yet. It's still warming up or something. I really don't know what to do.'

The next day Ross called her at work. She told him the cramps were mostly gone, but the bleeding was getting bad. She didn't think she could stay the rest of the day at her desk.

‘It’s probably just nothing,’ she said, her voice wavering. ‘I called my mother and left a message, but she hasn’t called me back yet.’

‘Just come home.’

‘I think I have to.’ She started crying. ‘I’m scared.’

‘Look, just come home. I’ll call Munder’s office, and we’ll take a cab over.’

‘We can’t afford a cab.’

‘Of course we can. Just come home, and— do you want me to come get you? I could come right now.’

‘Yes.’

Ross put his shoes on and ran out the door, forgetting to lock it. He was almost at the subway station when he remembered and had to come back. It took him nearly an hour to get there, the train sat in High Park station with its doors open for half an hour. There were announcements made on the PA system, but he couldn’t understand a word. Everyone in his car leaned toward the open doors when the echoing voice would start, trying to make out what had happened.

‘Is this for someone jumping, you think?’ Ross’s seatmate asked him.

‘No idea.’

‘Wish they’d tell us. This is stupid, just sitting here.’

The announcement began again in vain.

At Kathryn’s office the secretary out front looked worried. When he finally got off the elevator (he’d gone to the wrong floor twice), she jumped up at her desk and told him to go right in, but didn’t follow. Kathryn wasn’t at her desk. Angie told him she was probably in the bathroom. She looked upset. ‘I just feel so sick,’ she said. Ross found Kathryn on the way to the bathroom, sitting in one of the conference rooms. She had her bag with her. She was crying. She looked calm, but when she saw Ross she started crying again.

‘I couldn’t wait out there any more. Everyone kept coming up and asking what’s wrong.’

‘Let’s just go. We’ll get a cab.’

‘I think I need to go to the hospital.’

‘Are you serious? Is it that bad?’

The secretary appeared in the doorway, frozen. She wouldn't step across the threshold. 'I can drive you to St. Joe's if you want,' she said, holding her keys out in front of her.

Outside, Ross ran a few steps after a cab that didn't see them. He helped Kathryn get in, though he felt awkward doing it. She was white and silent for the first part of the trip, but then seemed to come awake. She spoke up in the middle of Ross saying something to the driver.

'We should call Dr Munder when we get there,' she said. 'Remind me to call him. There should be a phone in there somewhere. Can you call him? No, I'll call him, I know his number. I don't think I even ever wrote it down. If he's not around, should I get him paged? I'm so worried it's nothing, and he'll think I'm a freak. I'm totally overreacting. Everyone was freaking out at work, and that's what got me going, I think. I would have been fine. Did you see Larissa?'

'Who's that?' Ross asked. He was looking straight ahead. In his mind he was trying doors, all of them locked, the wall moving. He had an urge to stop the cab and just walk away. Or open the door suddenly and drop out onto the street.

Kathryn couldn't understand why they were moving forward, why they were in a hurry to get where they were going. She wasn't sick, she wasn't giving birth. Why were they in such a hurry? It was wrong for them to be doing this. Whatever happened would be their fault for doing this.

'I should maybe call my mother, too. Remind me. We'll do that and then go see a nurse. I'll call her again, she wasn't home. No! I can't do that – she'll panic and want to come here right away. I know she will. She took too much time off work the last time. I don't want to get her all worried. I didn't even bring my purse – do you have my purse? I feel so stupid. I can't do this, I can't handle it. How am I supposed to have a baby? Look at me. Oh my god!'

She collapsed so violently that the driver turned around in his seat. Ross tried to hold onto her, but they were both buckled in. They were less than a block away from the hospital. The driver asked which entrance to drop them at. Ross said, 'Emergency,' and waited for Kathryn to contradict him. She couldn't even look up. The driver helped her out, while Ross ran around the cab to get her. A nurse with wiry, black hair took Kathryn's arm and sat her in a chair, ignoring Ross completely. Another nurse came to get them both a few minutes

later, and Ross and Kathryn were taken in through wide, swinging doors. People lay on gurneys in the hallway, staring at the ceiling. The sound of televisions was everywhere.

When Ross finally had a chance to call Dr Munder's office, it was closed. He left a short message, saying what had happened and asking him to give them a call whenever he could. 'We're at home now,' he said. 'No rush.' The telephone felt hollow and fragile in his hand, like he could crack it with a squeeze. Kathryn was in bed. Ross had to force her to drink some water, she'd been crying so much. There were a few messages on the phone when he checked – his brother, some people from Kathryn's work. Ross wondered how he should get the message out. Whether he should do it, or Kathryn. He didn't want to have to call each and every person they knew and repeat the news fifty times. He didn't want to be consoled over the phone every time.

Kathryn kept waking up. She felt heavy, and couldn't lift her head off the bed. She thought she should feel lighter, empty. Cleaned out. Ross came in to check on her every once in a while. If she was awake, she pretended to be asleep. She had no idea what time it was.

Kathryn didn't go back to work for a couple of days. Ross wanted her to stay home for a couple of weeks at least, and when she spoke to her boss it sounded like that wouldn't be a problem, but she couldn't stand sitting around the apartment all the time, or how Ross tiptoed around her, or how the phone rang every few minutes with someone else saying how sorry they were. She started making Ross take all the calls, telling him to just say she was too sick to talk. She was just tired of people saying they were sorry, as if what had happened was the result of some vast conspiracy that was now being regretted by everyone involved. She convinced her mother to stay put, promising her she'd call her if she needed help. Ross's family were mostly worried about Kathryn, if she was feeling okay, as if she'd had an accident.

Back at work, people kept coming up to her – sometimes to give her a hug, but mostly just to stand near her awkwardly. *We won't let it happen again*, they seemed to be saying. After a few days of that, however, people mostly left her alone. Angie gossiped with her about what had happened while she was gone. Within a couple of weeks, most people were treating her normally. She had a routine performance review at the end of the month, and

while she suspected that her boss was eager to get it over with as quickly as possible, she didn't say anything and thanked her for the small, automatic raise that came at the end of it.

Ross got back to work on his thesis. He had cleaned out his desk and organized his files, expecting to have to eventually store everything away, and he was finding now that the work was easier with everything sorted out. His advisor offered to move back a few dates, but he was getting more done than he'd expected, so he said not to bother.

'Will you try again right away, or wait?' Kathryn's mother asked her on the phone.

'I have no idea – I can't really even think about that right now. I feel so weird about it, like everything was a big mistake or something.'

'Don't say that. Please don't say that.'

'No, I mean, like it was a mistaken identity or something. They picked the wrong person. I'm already starting to forget what it felt like. It's almost scary.'

Ross and Kathryn had a few, tentative conversations about what to do next. She told him she wanted one, for sure, but couldn't decide if they should wait. Ross just nodded. In the days after coming home from the hospital, she couldn't even imagine having another baby right away. Like it would be the second death of the first. After that, she went right the other way, wanting to get pregnant right away, before everyone found out what happened, so she could say, 'But don't worry...' She didn't even know if she was physically capable. That urge faded, and she was left without resolve of any kind. For a couple of weeks she found Ross's presence in the apartment irritating. She slept on top of the sheets, just for the sensation of being away from his body. They were like a sleeper cell for some terrorist plot, not sure what to do with themselves now that the whole thing had been called off. 'You're just always here when I get home!' she told him, trying to explain why she was so touchy after work all the time.

'Where am I supposed to go?' he asked her. He was ashamed of it, and he never said anything about it, but he couldn't help feeling as though he'd been given a reprieve. Before it all ended, he'd started to feel some small stirrings of real excitement, of pride at what the two of them were about to do. But that was never enough to fully smother the feeling that it was all happening at the wrong time, for both of them. Soon, when Kathryn was feeling better, they could talk about the whole thing, and he could say that if they really wanted to do this thing, they needed to plan it out right, to make sure it didn't completely derail them.

A few months later, Ross got a teaching job at the university, and convinced Kathryn to move to an apartment closer to campus. It would mean a shorter commute for her, anyway. And living right downtown wouldn't be such a big deal if it was just the two of them. She picked him up after work sometimes, and they went out for dinner, or picked a few things up to make in their new, open-concept kitchen. Once or twice they took the long way home that brought them through the park. They avoided the playground, but usually ran into people they knew walking their dogs. Kathryn couldn't get over the jumpy, little Jack Russel that belonged to one of Ross's former classmates.

'Look at him!' she said, as the dog tried to jump up into her hands. It was skittish, and wouldn't sit still for more than a few seconds, but she held it just long enough to feel the throb of its heart against her hand, and the shiver of need that went through it at her touch.

They went home, talking about dogs the whole way.

They spent the winter settling into their new apartment. In January, they had a chance to move into the loft above them, but waited too long, and the landlord gave it away. Kathryn liked the new place, except for the bedroom window, which faced onto the alleyway instead of the street – the noise was always more violent and unpredictable. By Valentine's Day, she was at least relieved to find she was sleeping through the night, almost every night. When she was up in the middle of the night, she thought of less, and could return to bed sooner, slipping in beside Ross and sleeping the rest of the way.