

From Somewhere Far Away

written by Guest Contributor | February 23, 2018



On the screen is a blur of black and white: blobby shapes, goopy like the stuff on my abdomen.

The ultrasound technician says, "I don't know what I'm seeing here. Would you want to know, if there were multiples? Would it make a difference?" I would want to know. "Okay. See here?" Kind of. Something with a pulse. "Well if you look here, it looks like there's another heartbeat. I'm just not sure what I'm seeing."

Another technician comes in with darker skin and a serious demeanor. Now I'm just crying, it's taken on its own momentum. The first technician stands by the alternate's shoulder. The new one says,

"No. It's not two. See here? You're just seeing the heartbeat from another angle."

"Ah. Okay. Okay." The first one seems moderately convinced. It's definitely not two? I ask.

"Definitely not."

After this, I have to go through an interview to make sure I know what I'm doing, that I'm of sound mind and clear heart and have considered all my options. Adoption, parenting—that I feel confident about what I'm getting myself into—or out of. I answer the questions definitively, so I'm given the pass.

In two feet of snow, I walk with my mom and two northern breed dogs, my mom's face framed by a furry hood, me in good winter boots and a sturdy coat.

"Whatever decision you make will be okay, Cam. I'll support whatever decision you make," she tells me again. I had known I could come home to my mom. I had known she would be here for me, whatever I chose. Someone else had suggested I try imagining *yes, have this baby* one day, and *no, don't have it* the next.

But that whole premise is impossible. What is actual is a living thing with a pulse inside me, what is actual is my self creating a home for another

self, my own blood faster, progesterone coursing through my system, and—I feel it's so—a new spirit within me. To make a decision, as though rationality could come gallantly in with the power of deductive thought, is, in a way, ridiculous. It is not about that.

Weirdly, then, something else has to happen. The woman with whom I have distance counseling sessions, Shawnie, says I have to receive this pregnancy, no matter what choice I make. I can picture Shawnie, her long brown hair falling softly around her face, her soulful brown eyes, her tan shoulders and long limbs. I can hear the lilt of her Kiwi accent, and I can imagine her at the playground with her six-year-old son, the gum trees around us. I can almost smell the ocean. I have to sit with this spirit, Shawnie tells me, I have to feel her. We feel it's a her. And then I can make whatever choice I will make. I must accept that it's bigger than—truly—she says, I can conceive of.

We conceived! That's the miracle. Cock, an odiferous armpit, scraggly hair and insecurity, a self I never got to be at sixteen; weed, a bottle of wine, riding a rental car in New Zealand, skinny dipping stoned on New Year's Eve, sharing a bed with another couple, heat waves of jealousy, washed ashore after Waikeke Island, riding bikes and doing psychedelics that mute me, staying in a cottage beside a field of cows on the South Island. A swath of tears and a convergence of endings. Leaving the Southern Hemisphere again. Leaving him. Losses tied to other losses, other endings.

After finding out at a café in Melbourne, I call to tell him. Zach comes back from work early and waits for me on the porch, strumming a guitar to pass the time, and says,

"Well. It kind of makes sense, doesn't it? This being the central issue of why we won't work long term. Now we're ending, and now this is happening." I don't know that this makes sense. I don't know anything. I only know I'm pregnant.

My Australian friend ten years my senior, a powerhouse of a woman who shares custody—amicably—of her twelve year-old, tells me she's good with infants, that all I have to really know is whether I believe in Zach as a good person, not whether we will work.

"Alternatively," she says, "since I get pregnant when I look at a penis, the way I go, if you want to go that way, is the pill, which feels more natural than the surgical option."

Zach, once we're back at his outdoor shack, asks me how I feel. I don't know.

"But do you feel a little bit happy, that you're pregnant?" Yes. I feel a little bit happy.

He looks me in the eyes; his own a dark and wild galaxy.

"Don't have this baby." I look back at him, feeling younger than sixteen, but I don't have anything to say.

I fly to the U.S. the next day.

I met Zach at a Contact Improvisation jam. He was just a tall lanky young smelly guy the first and second times I saw him; someone to ignore or be a tad annoyed by. Why do these too-young throwback hippies have to come in and try to make Contact cool? I just wanted to dance with my friends. But then Zach took my class, the Upside Down Locomotion one I taught a few times, and I kept calling him "Jack."

"It's Zach," he kept correcting me, not impatiently. And then he ended up at another spot where I'd been hanging out: the stoner house where my brother spent his evenings and occasional days, long-boarding down steep hills with musician dudes, smoking bongos and playing video games. With Zach there, two disparate worlds converged, and I got to be the Cool Older Woman, an Expert at Contact Improvisation no less, with words of wisdom to share with him: "Avoid the power-hungry, the creepy, the overconfident. Don't be a predatory guy." But we were falling.

My mom hates Zach, which I receive appreciatively. "He's an asshole, Cam. And I hate the way he looks. He literally makes my skin crawl when I see photos of him." She never liked the sound of him during the brief time we were together, and the dislike has strengthened and solidified after I am pregnant and he is adamant that I terminate. Her hate of him undermines his sway over me, which is a psychic dark rye and black and blue of Van Gogh, a starry night and watery undertow of so many un-nameable things: power, desirability, the invention of family, part fitting into part, the seductive pull of possibility. Where am I?

On Skype Zach says,

"Don't do this to me. You can have another family." On Skype he pulls out his cock and watches me touch myself, as he touches himself. My breasts are enormous. Where is he?

The day of, he's driving through the country in his beat-up VW, and he's not available to talk. Anger courses through me, burping and broiling—I don't want it. In my mother's living room, the matching couch and love seat feature printed pink flowers in bloom. I crouch on the carpet in child's pose, trying to bleed out my feelings onto giant sheets of paper using magic marker. Grief is better than this. Two hours ago there was another pulse in me, and now there's a thread of copper wire, a T-shaped IUD.

I'm swaddled in the fold of my family's company. I make my mom and Steve, my stepdad, chocolate chip cookies. We watch American Idol on TV. We cry when Candice Glover wins. She's twenty-three, the same age as Zach. I cry a lot, unexpectedly, whenever and wherever: in the basement where my mom works on her computer. "Do you think there were multiples, Mom? What if there were multiples?"

"There weren't. And you made the right decision, because you made it. I know it feels impossible to imagine now, but you'll come through this. I promise." And it's true, puncturing the despair are moments of awe, a kind of vertigo

of possibility. I'm thinking of who I can be now that I'm not a mother to this never-to-be baby. Everything from now on is a dedication to her, not her denial. Shawnie, the Kiwi counselor who helped me receive this conceived spirit writes, "I can still feel her, when I write to you."

I can too.



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