

I Got Accidentally Pregnant at 48 and Other Things I Don't Put on Facebook



Uzo Egonu, *Woman in Grief*, 1968

I pulled my husband into our bathroom as soon as he walked in the door from work, away from the kids I didn't give him a chance to say hello to.

"Okay," I began. Deep breath. "No one's sick and no one's dead, but what's the worst possible thing I could tell you right now?"

And without missing a beat, he offered, "You're pregnant?"

I could tell from his tone and look he knew it wasn't that. That would be crazy. Craaa-zeee! We are both 48 after all. Almost 49 actually.

“Yes!” I may have said it with a little too much glee, but I was excited he guessed correctly. We know each other pretty well. We’re a good pair.

“What? How?” He was not as interested in his guessing right as I was.

We both knew how. We have two children in the other room after all, 9 and 13, one of whom less than a week earlier we officially took out of school for a medical leave of depression and were in the middle of having tested for a myriad of learning issues. Our hands were pretty full.

But the how was fairly simple. At my doctor’s suggestion I went off the pill a few months earlier to be able to check my hormone levels to see where I was with peri-menopause. 48, remember. On our anniversary, we got sloppy. I’d had some Bailey’s, like at our wedding. Our marriage was fine, but fine is just fine. We had been so much more than fine at other points in our time together. Steak and table prepared Caesar salad sounded like something we needed and we did. It worked. There he is. There’s my funny guy. Here I am. Here’s the girl who is fun to be around.

“Dear John’s,” I said. The name of the restaurant we went to that night. I know exactly when it was. When you’ve been married a long time and have a child with extra needs, you know exactly when you made that unplanned baby. I saw

the recognition wash over his face. My husband's shock and borderline devastation were jolting to me.

I had already texted my psychiatrist and spoken to her earlier in the day. I told her first actually. I take Prozac and Adderall. I didn't take either when I had my children — or the three miscarriages in between them. I would continue with the Prozac, she advised, and stop the Adderall. I had a plan. I didn't know what my plan was but I wanted to do it right whatever it turned out to be.

It didn't seem my husband's plan included any necessity for going off medication.

This took me a minute to take in. Weirdly, I just started to laugh.

There, in our bathroom, I just couldn't stop laughing, like borderline hysterical actually.

This was ridiculous. A ridiculous situation.

If I laid out everything we as a family had been through the last year or so, you would realize your only option was to laugh too. Our son refused to go to school and barely leaves the house. My husband broke his finger playing softball, no biggie, but then he actually needed surgery, so biggie. We got a new dog, who won't stop pooping on the rug. My father-in-law, my sons' Papa, died in a rather tragic way that

landed him in the burn unit for a week, which prompted the medical leave for depression for our son. Our hands were quite full.

“We can’t have another baby,” he loud whispered in the bathroom so the kids didn’t hear him but making sure I did. He was absolutely right, but his authoritative tone didn’t sit well with me. I didn’t answer him.

“You’re not having it, right?”

I had gotten the second dog without his approval. I had filled out the application while he was in surgery on my phone in the waiting room. I had seen the dog a few days earlier with our younger son and I just decided this was something we needed. He liked her enough, but wasn’t sure. I am queen of we make decisions as a couple. We are in it together. We buy furniture together. I wait and run most big ideas past him, even mundane ‘I was thinking of moving this piece of furniture across the room’ ideas. We are a team. And yet, with the dog, I moved forward without permission, bringing him along, hoping he’d jump on board the train that had already left the station. It was very out of character for me.

So here in his embrace in front of our bathroom mirror as he declared we couldn’t have another baby, I felt the same separation and need to make my own individual decision.

Obviously this is the biggest decision a couple can make and should make together. But I am the one who gained 52 pounds, the one whose body was cut open, the one whose career ended to stay home because our son needed extra support. I am the one who nursed through mastitis and never fully lost the weight. I am the one who says what we are or aren't growing in my body even if it wrecks it. And I felt pretty fucking adamant about that.

I stepped back and informed him, kindly, that I didn't know what I was going to do. I hadn't decided yet. This was completely unexpected and surprising for me. I will march on Washington every day of the week for women to have access to safe and legal abortion, but having one myself? That I didn't know. I had already been through that procedure when I miscarried years ago, I knew what it entailed. And it sucked. I could see his fear. Rationally, at 48, having another baby doesn't make much sense. Both of our children ended up in the NICU. Not fun. One has ongoing issues from his complicated birth. I was considered a geriatric pregnancy with him when I was just 35. He's now 13. What would I be considered now at 48?

Ridiculous. We can't have another baby. Get it together. Let's go make the kids dinner. I put the test in my bathroom vanity drawer and put it away, like in the movie Singles when they take a pregnancy test and look at it and don't react and

kiss and go off to work like everything is fine. When I open the drawer I'll think Oh you're still there? Oh that really happened? Oh the two lines are still there. Cool cool cool cool cool. If I close the drawer it isn't happening. La La La, I can't hear you. He's totally right.

OMFG! Pregnant at 48? Who does that happen to? We can't do this.

But.

What.

If.

It's.

A.

Girl.....

I have two sons.

I grew up just me and my mom. A daughter seemed inevitable. More than a wish. It seemed who I was. My husband was one of two brothers. He got his same family recreated (without the divorce part). I always thought I would too (without the dead father part). I had made peace years ago with my never having the daughter I expected. Or had I?

It would probably be twin boys anyway.

And would that be so bad? I love my boys. Would that be at all doable? No, it wouldn't. I am so tired even without twins.

Almost 50.

At 48, I was tired, oh, so tired, but still couldn't sleep thru a full night and my weight gain was gaining on me. This must be peri-menopause and even menopause I rationalized. No one could feel this badly just for no reason. So months earlier I had called my doctor to have my levels checked. That's what you do, right? You check your levels or your hormones or some such thing. I didn't really know, but I figured she would. So I called my obstetrician. She had retired the day before. The day before. Back to Ireland with her long black hair for a deserved break. But she was one of the few people in the world who could look at me and know my truth. She and my husband were there in that room with me when our whole lives switched course. She was there. She was there when my son was born and almost died. She is the one who pulled him from my body, pale and unresponsive. She had become a fixture in my mind of salvation and goodness and I felt connected to her in that way that trauma connects us.

I missed her by a day. And if there were letters or emails announcing her move, I missed it. This seemed symbolic but

I wasn't yet sure of what.

A bit thrown, I decided I am a big girl and an adult and I will be okay without her. It's just a blood draw. And the Doctor who assisted her for my C-section was still practicing.

Do you remember me I asked him when I saw him in the hallway. He did not. The fetal-maternal transfusion? About 13 years ago? My placenta hemorrhaged?

I could see his face turn in recognition. From sadness to kindness all in a split second. I'd heard there had only been two of these in my OB's career. And in another she'd heard the baby had died. I was famous here in this office. And there was a weird terrible part of me that needed this to be known while I walked these halls. It was here where I mentioned in passing I hadn't felt the baby move. It was here where they hooked me up to monitors and after eating cookies and drinking juice, they still couldn't get a read on the baby's heartbeat. It was here where they sent me over to the hospital because they have better equipment. 10% chance you'll have the baby today they said. It was here it was still calm.

It was also here where I brought him with me for follow-ups and to show him off. He exists. You did this. You saved him. Here he is with his blonde hair and blue eyes. My son.

It was here where ultrasounds told a truth of another baby that wasn't to be. And it was there in that room across from the bathroom where I leave my samples and the front desk where I pay my co-pay where they scraped those cells out of me a few days later. It was here where good and bad intertwined and yet I still felt safe. It was here where I ran to when my water broke with my younger child at only 34 weeks. Catch me again. Save us again. Please. And she did.

I wanted them to make me feel safe as my body seemed to be betraying me daily. They had done it many times before.

So my new OB sat me down and explained in order to test for such a thing you must go off your birth control pills. Oh, I didn't know that. So I did and we tested and I was not in menopause yet. Okay, is that good or bad? But you are way down here he said holding his hand down to the ground. Minuscule chance you could get pregnant. Ask me how many 48 year old women I have seen get pregnant without assistance. "Zero!" he said while holding his hand in an O shape and he sent me on my way with my new knowledge.

And then I forgot about it and had some Bailey's.

And so now here we were with this secret we shared hidden away in our vanity drawer.

Later that night my husband gave me the speech he should

have in the bathroom. "I'm here for you whatever you decide." And I realized he just needed a little time. I had had the whole day away from him to think about it. He'd had about thirty seconds.

We sat down to watch TV with our younger son. HBO's *His Dark Materials*. They had been reading the series together as a father/son thing. I didn't know anything about it, except it was about a young girl named Lyra and a magical adventure. That's a nice name I kept thinking to myself watching the show. Lyra Silver Tongue. Strong, ballsy, curious, defiant. Lyra. We sat on the couch with our son watching Lyra with our secret. Lyra was how I imagined I could be — redoing childhood with the knowledge I have after living a life. Energetic and ballsy. Not afraid. Instead I was quiet and meek and really just trying to squeak on by without being noticed much. I quietly added the name to the girl list we'd had for the other pregnancies. If I couldn't be like Lyra, perhaps my daughter could.

Daughter. The word swirled in my head.

Our list: Sarah, a classic with Sadie as a nickname. This was to have been Ben's name. We opted to be surprised and had names picked out for both boy or girl. Ruthie, also classic and biblical, and after Jay's grandmother. This was the middle name we had both times. Eli was going to be Lucy. Lucy Ruth. I said it so much I was floored when he came out

a boy. I had gotten so used to it and how it rolled off my tongue. I thought it was meant to be. We considered Lily and Scarlett. Now Lyra.

Ruthie could also be for Richard, the boys' Papa. Out from the shadows of middle name considerations, now the lead. Our Papa, whose death reached down deep into the depths of my son and woke him up to a grief he had never experienced before. He'd lost grandparents before this, but at 13, as he explained it, this was the first time he actually understood what dying meant. If my math is correct, it would be the year anniversary of Papa's death just as I would be giving birth. Off by two days. That seemed very clean and nice. Perfect in fact if she arrived on the anniversary and we named her for him. It would make a lot of people smile again.

I should step back for a moment though and add here and make super clear, this story does not end with a baby.

The doctor's test the next day confirmed what the drug store test told us in the bathroom. The blood test two days after that confirmed what we all knew but weren't saying. Yes, I was pregnant, but the numbers weren't great. Not doubling as they should. Not even close.

I have been pregnant before. 5 times. 2 children. 3 miscarriages in between them. I have no trouble getting

pregnant (obviously), but staying pregnant was a completely different story.

With my younger son years earlier, I poked myself with needles full of progesterone in that first trimester, alone in our only bathroom there in our apartment in Santa Monica. I would alternate the sides of my belly daily to avoid massive bruising, determined to hold on to this child this time no matter what. Progesterone has never really been my friend, hence the 3 miscarriages. If my body couldn't make it, at least I could buy it. They could bottle it and I could plunge it deep into me thru a needle and I could try and build a stronger womb. And I did. That child is off somewhere now almost ten years later in our 3 bedroom 2 bath house in Culver City chilling most likely in his boxers playing Fortnite or watching Youtube now delaying doing his homework.

But that's a lot of work and effort for something I wasn't sure I even wanted. And forget about wanted, wasn't sure I could even handle.

Dr. B. walked me out of his office. Let's see what happens he offered. This time without shots we agreed. His eyes were kind and even though he wasn't my original OB, I felt safe and tended to. Let's see what your body does he advised.

What my body does? What my body does? My body could

not be trusted, clearly. That point had been established quite definitively.

I made my way home to Culver City through this Santa Monica neighborhood where his office is and what used to be where we made our home, carrying this new official knowledge. There was Douglas Park where I took Ben almost every day of his young life to play with the ducks. There's the crosswalk on Wilshire where after retracing our steps, I found the white flat polar bear lovey Ben had dropped run over by a car, with a tire mark no less, but he didn't notice. Down a bit there towards the ocean is where I went for a mani pedi while pregnant with Eli, only 34 weeks, and my water broke. There is the parking lot I pulled into late at night in the dark after a rehearsal for a show I was in as my body started rejecting that first pregnancy after Ben. I just couldn't make it those last few blocks and needed to stop. "Something bad just happened," I told Jay as I made my way in the door later at home. And he cleaned me up. As partners do.

I didn't want to choose to have or not have this baby.

Let my body figure it out.

Okay, sounds good, reasonable.

But that's a cop out. Without shots, I knew what choice I

was making.

While I waited in limbo, to see what our future held, my body hurt in new and different ways. A constant ache in my lower back, a reminder of my body's struggle.

I must be having an ectopic pregnancy I rationalized and this was how I would die. That seemed fitting. I started to imagine Sandra Oh collapsing as Christina on Grey's Anatomy and I wondered when I too would dramatically collapse. Would I feel it coming? Would I bleed a lot thru my clothes ruining some new leggings from Target or just go straight down with no warning? Would I be driving on the 405 and inadvertently hurt someone else, walking the dogs to school - would they get loose, picking up Eli from school surrounded by all the other neighborhood moms? What would they say? Would they run to my aid? Who would shield Eli's eyes? It felt appropriate that pregnancy would be the end of me. Motherhood has been at times.

Here's what is unsaid: I didn't want this baby. But I didn't want to choose not to have it.

What I wanted was to be 35 or so again and have this baby then. Horrible and hard to admit but a few years ago I wondered if I knew what I knew now would I choose motherhood. I didn't always answer yes or even of course. I want to say I would never walk away or run away or ever find

fault with something so intrinsically animalistic, as being a mother, to our very nature. There have been times in the throes of it all that I wondered what it would take to walk away. My therapist assures me this is normal and reminds me I have not actually abandoned my responsibilities. But I've thought about it. And yet here I was contemplating signing up all over again.

Oh Rachel? She went to the corner store for milk, bread, cigarettes (insert item to be fetched here)....haven't seen her since. Perhaps I would be a Dateline episode or just a segment on Unsolved Mysteries. And then I would have to return from quiet Island living to save my husband who'd been wrongly convicted of having been involved with my disappearance.

It would take him time, but he'd forgive me.

I kept imagining all kinds of crazy scenarios. The craziest of all - actually having the baby.

Ruthie?

Noah? No guarantee it's a girl after all.

Ridiculous.

"Did you tell your mother?" I ask Jay one night while getting ready for bed.

"About what?" And in the way too long beat it takes him to figure out what I am referring to I have vowed that if I have to indicate towards my belly that I will be packing up and moving out. "No," he says getting it. He hasn't told her yet. He he hasn't been thinking about it much he admits.

What a fucking luxury.

I am suddenly so angry at him for not getting it or seeing that this was a piece of my body dying and stumbling infuriated me. This was not preschools and homework and babysitters and other things we didn't want to do all over again. This was my body, hurting. A walking manifestation of the painful and life altering decision we had to manage.

We keep pregnancy, good or bad, a secret at first. I have done this. I have lied when I knew I was pregnant but still wanted it just between me and my husband. But this, this I could not contain or keep to myself. "I am 48!" I kept saying to anyone who would listen. I can't keep the info to myself (my husband can't seem to keep the info in his brain). At first the news started to bubble up and dribble out only to strangers, like the women who took my blood at my OB's office. Did this news shock them? I watch their faces as they dab my bleeding arm with cotton. "I'm 48!" No reaction, maybe a polite smile. They have probably seen this before, but still it's rare I remind them. Or my pharmacist. Omg, wanna hear something crazy? I'd offer up when

picking up medicine at CVS.

When I told my best friend driving around running errands a couple days later, she thought I was kidding. She is really the only one I still talk on the actual phone with. As I drive around from Pavillions to Target to school drop off or pick up, I can lay it all out for her. Look at my ridiculous life!!!

With her though, it felt real and sad, like the hard part of the word ridiculous, not the funny part.

"Wow."

"I know."

"Really?"

"Yes."

And repeat.

Sigh.

And then I started to cry and could share with her what I hadn't shared yet with Jay, that maybe, kinda, sorta, a little, I might, like, want want this?

"Wow."

"I know."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Sigh.

"But what is wrong with being hopeful?" I cried to her thru the speaker phone in my car. My car was my solace, a place for solitary between ferrying others around. "The audacity of hope," I said thru a little bit of snot, not even realizing I was quoting the title of Barack Obama's memoir. I may have even stuck my pointer finger up as if she could see me in the car and the strong point I was making.

The goddamn audacity of hope.

And despite how ridiculous this all was, I was happy to feel something new talking with her there in the car, something unplanned, something that had the potential to be good. Feeling hopeful felt like a kindness I hadn't experienced in a long time. The audacity of hope. Why does being hopeful seem so daring.

The audacity of goddamn hope.

In another weird twist of timing, my first miscarriage/D&C the one that when it started caused me to pull over late at night into a parking lot, happened on the same day of Obama's inauguration. And now it was almost

to the day, January 20th, but 11 years later. That was weird. Was this another sign from Ruthie?

I check Facebook's On This Day Memories daily, but I didn't need to check it to know I hadn't told the world about my miscarriage then. I am mostly an open book. An over-sharer some could say. A memoirist. But some things just don't make the permanent record — as Facebook has come to be known. I didn't post about taking misoprostol that morning as Obama was sworn in and I didn't post about the cramps that made me writhe in pain in my bed as I watched him in front of The Capitol Building with Michelle by his side in her yellowish gold outfit. I posted about chocolate cake on Jan 20 2009. I have no idea why. I don't even remember having chocolate cake that day. Maybe it was a treat my husband got me for having a painful miscarriage. And I didn't post about the pills not working or the D&C (Dilation and Curettage, think about those words, ugh) I had to have later that same day and I didn't post about this pregnancy either on January 20, 2020.

Instead, I cried to my friends or hid in my room. In my bed.

"Mommie!"

Here they come.

Ugh. Always.

“Mommie!”

“Don’t bother Mommie, right now,” I could hear Jay thru the door as he tried to redirect one or both of the children as they sought me out.

“Mommie!”

Not now. Please.

And I could see my bedroom door handle shake like a horror movie scene close up, and was ever so grateful our door handle gets jammed and is hard to open.

The dogs sit by me staring, ready for when I am ready to walk them again. “What?!” I say to Harry and feel him tsk tsk me for hiding away.

I hear Eli ask for help picking his science project.

“How about how long it takes Mommie to miscarry,” I mutter under my breath.

Ridiculous. I am the same age my grandmother was when I was born! No spring chicken over here.

But the images of Kobe with his daughter sprouting up all over Los Angeles and the internet, now gone forever, together, have me at some point going from hoping to bleed replaced by relief each time I don’t.

Could it be? Days turn into weeks.

I cling to stories on Google of women posting how there had been no heartbeat and then there was, how bad initial numbers proved unreliable. Maybe we can handle this I hear in small whispers.

So back at Dr. B's office I go again to check my status. There's a big huge screen on the wall hooked up to the ultrasound machine, like go all out watch the Super Bowl on big. Very hi- tech. Nothing that fancy was here when I had my babies. This is nice, this is possible?

I can hear a loud heart beat rhythmically beat from the room next door. Congratulations to them I guess? Come to my office we'll talk he says. And I get dressed and follow him down the hall, but I know. It is official. There was no zygote, or fetus, or to be baby, there was nothing to see on my empty ultrasound on the big ass screen.

"Not viable," I heard him say.

There it was. The actual words.

"But?"

"No," he didn't even let me finish. "Not viable," he repeated.

Go home and let's see what happens. Let's try to avoid that

procedure — indicating to the room down the hall.

And I knew he was right. Despite my searching, there's not much on the internet to make you feel better in this category. Even deep corners of Reddit aren't ripe with 48 year old pregnant moms. So I went home and ached in bed and waited to bleed again, trapped between expecting to not be expecting anymore.

So I take to my bed again, like some fair maiden, or someone convalescing from tuberculosis in a novel. From my bed, I continue to scroll Facebook, Twitter, email. A beacon of light, a portal to the outside world. Facebook, Twitter, email. Normalcy. When I had reached the second semester of pregnancy with Eli, I just posted one word on Facebook. "Preggers." I had been planning it for weeks. I was so proud of myself and the simplicity and I ate up the likes and comments. Everyone was so happy for me. I could probably make the same impact with a post that just says "Miscarrying." That implies ongoing, still happening. Suffering. But I don't. Ridiculous. The light of my phone glows in the dark of our room as my husband sleeps next to me. The phone is my constant companion, keeping me an arm's length, literally, from my him, as I hold it out between us, as he sleeps, and I don't.

He hates Facebook.

I turn over away from him and log onto Etsy. I have initial necklaces for each of my sons. A "B" and an "E." My best girlfriends and I gifted them to each other when we had our babies. I loved touching them and holding them, comforted by the sensation of moving them back and forth on the chain. A tangible connection to my offspring. I wanted that for this. I ordered an "S," for our last name.

We were invited to a party that weekend. Our friend was turning 50 but also celebrating an Oscar nomination! Our friend was nominated for a legit real Academy Award. A fucking Academy Award! Amazing. The awards were the same weekend as his birthday. Who wouldn't have a big party? And what kind of friend would I be if I missed it? Or if I made my husband miss it? But I just couldn't go. My friends, our friends, these friends, knew. I had shared the news with them. But seeing them and their knowing eyes filled with love for me was too much to take in, too much to feel, this wasn't joshing with the pharmacist. So I sent Jay off on his own and stayed in my bed. I assured him it was fine by me (it wasn't). Besides, I had nothing to wear, peri menopausal/pregnancy had made sure of that. Or was it the chips keeping me company in bed? Who knows?

It was the chips.

Anyway, my sons noticed me in my room more and more. Of course. I hadn't told them. Not because we don't talk about

stuff. We do. We talk about it all. Death, sex, love, war, nothing is off limits if they have questions.

But Eli's fish had just died and to my utter surprise when he came to tell me he'd found his fish dead, his stoicism quickly turned to hysterics. And I knew as we buried the fish in our yard behind where the swing set had been that this is something I can't tell him. He's only 9. I can't burden him with this sadness. I can't chance another child incapacitated by grief. The chance of another sibling? One who won't be mean to him? One he could be older than? Another chance to be a brother? And then that possibility taken away before it even arrived? I may not be able to shield him from all hurt, but I don't have to be the cause of it. And so we buried Fish Andrew and set about to get another. Because fish can be replaced.

But my body needed to rest and I continued to retreat to my room at any opportunity, away from him, hurting him just the same with my ever growing absence. I settled deeper into my bed under the covers, with my weighted blanket on top of the comforter and then a Wizard of Oz blanket on top of that. Snug like a bug. My bed is a source of multitudes, solace in one breath and trapped by sadness in another, as if I will be swallowed whole by it like Johnny Depp in *Nightmare on Elm Street*.

"You're always in your room," Eli said to me years earlier.

And from then on out, it was decided. I was always in my room. (I wasn't.) It was fact in his world, a fact he didn't like but had accepted. It didn't seem to matter that that was the summer I had bronchitis. I am not always in my room, but I was then. It struck and hurt me deeply. "Hey I had bronchitis and we still went on an adventure on the Metro and had dim sum and I got your brother to camp at Dodger Stadium on time every day even with a three year old tagging along!" I didn't actually say any of that. I knew I couldn't defend myself by pointing out all I do for him and his brother. I knew not watching a movie with him once will be what he remembers and not all the meals prepped or nights nursed. And now I am back in my room, away from him and not able to tell him why. I didn't know how to explain to him the emotional and physical toll of motherhood without casting him as a burden, which he wasn't. Could I explain how I had never had any intention to not have a job for over a decade. I didn't know how to tell him I absolutely adore him, would die (and/or kill) for him, but motherhood, not so much. To him the two are intrinsically linked. No one wants a mother who says look what I have done for you. What I wanted him to know and feel deeply though was look what you've done for me.

I knew what he felt. My mother told me once when I was an adult that she didn't enjoy motherhood. I was offended. I thought it meant she didn't like how I had turned out. That I

had disappointed her somehow, that her experience of motherhood was tied to and determined by me. No, she assured. Rather, she loved me so much she was able to mother me well despite how much she didn't love motherhood. I thought it was because she had been widowed and raised me on her own. That seemed quite a reasonable reason not to enjoy something. But now as I wrestle with motherhood myself, I understand that wasn't only it. It's a lot to ask of someone. To grow a person. To tend to that person's every need. To put yourself and your needs aside, for years, sometimes forever. And yet that call is strong despite the knowledge. Is it that we forget the struggle and the pain that we willingly sign up to do it again, poking ourselves daily with needles? Or we just know that we can muddle through anything. I mean who would choose to go thru pregnancy and childbirth (or motherhood) again if you could actually remember the pain?

Here's the thing about pain. You don't remember it. You remember having it but your body can't feel it exactly the same again. It's what allows us to do hard things again. When I was a child I had to have several teeth pulled at once. The way my mother tells the story, they gave me a pain killer that didn't stop me from feeling the pain, just from remembering it. I have no memory of screaming and crying as they yanked my teeth out. But my mother does. She could hear me down the hall. Wailing. And their choice to

give me that medicine has always seemed cruel to me. Only she remembers. She carries the memory of my pain, not me.

That's motherhood. I'll take it. Give it to me, all your pain. It's okay.

But now it is just a story, eventually becoming that thing we talk about. That ridiculous thing. Like what were they thinking in the early 80's? Like when we go to The Farmer's Market in Santa Monica every Sunday and how I point out the mani pedi salon on Main Street to Eli where my water broke with him as if it is the very first time I am telling him this story and he gets annoyed and then he laughs. And then I do the same routine the next Sunday and every Sunday after that. And we laugh and laugh. It wasn't funny then. It is now. Stories evolve.

And I know this will just be a crazy thing we talk about some day, maybe at a dinner party. That time Rachel thought menopause had started but really she was just PREGNANT!

We'd squeal with laughter and then ask for dessert.

Ridiculous.

But if the smart choice was not to tell Eli, I felt differently about Ben. I needed to explain my distance. He's smart. He's already struggling. Deeply. I'd hate for him to think I

was sick, like with cancer or something, keeping it from him. That my secret would eventually take me away from him.

I knock on his door, his 'Operations Room' sign from The Churchill Museum from our trip to London two years earlier hangs on his door. He'd put it up himself. Got out the hammer and nails from the shed. He won't fill his own water bottle now, but this he did. When I see his door, I am reminded of all of his capabilities. Like mine though, they are hiding out in his room.

From the doorway I begin some speech about how we have both been in our rooms lately.

"Have you noticed?"

I hadn't really planned this out. He knows where babies come from. We have had that talk. Many times. I don't have to go there. He stops me, barely looking up.

"I know, I know," he says.

"You do?"

"Yes, sometimes people are depressed," he says almost monotone, but giving me permission to admit to my own depression. We've done this he wants to say. We talk about depression in our house a lot. I am open to a fault perhaps, but my son knows depression is what killed my father and

he knows this is a home where messy is welcomed and embraced and where it will not kill anyone else if I have anything to say about it.

"No that's not it," I say before I can think of anything better to say. "I'm pregnant." I just blurted it out.

He looks up, probably from his laptop opened to a video game.

Silence.

"But it isn't taking." I try to fill the space in the air with these words, like these words can explain this to a 13 year old boy. "My body is working it out." He looks stunned. That's appropriate actually. Stunned is right. He retreats back into his bedroom. Away from me in the doorway. Like being pulled back into a tunnel.

He is not your friend.

He is your son.

Be the mother I remind myself.

"Do you have any questions?"

Remember your boundaries. I do not have the luxury of laying this on him, of seeking solace. I wish he and I could just collapse on the floor in giggles. For all his struggles,

Ben may be the funniest person I know. Anyone else he would think this was hysterical.

A very quick "NOPE!" comes my way. If he could have shut the door with his eyes from all the way across the room, he would have. Slammed it probably.

I close the door on my way out, back to my room, back to my bed.

At my next drs appointment Dr. B pulls my ultrasound up on the screen.

"Ah, there we go. This is why."

But I don't need to know why.

"May I have a picture?"

"Your cervix is blocked."

I meant to ask last time. Perhaps they still have my image in the machine deep in there of when the image actually existed instead of empty broken up clumps that were now blocking my cervix, unable to escape my body, unable to finish the deed.

But there's nothing there he said too quickly. That's okay. I'll still take it I offered, shy but determined.

I have been handed these images before. I have them tucked away in albums, getting bigger and bigger, of Ben, of Eli, of the three in between. And so the nurse in the room printed it out from the machine and handed it to me. It resembles a photograph. White border around the edges, of a black hole basically, with my name and the date typed neatly on the side. But its nothingness was something tangible to me, something that took up space, like the S necklace. A permanent mark. This, like the necklace, will end up stashed away to stumble upon, once or maybe twice a year. Probably in my Filofax for the picture and my nightstand drawer for the necklace.

I gazed upon the ultrasound picture I held in my hand as he scraped the rest of the remnants away. I could hear him say, "Sorry." I must have winced. I closed my eyes and looked away and braced as he took it out of me, hoping that was the last of it. Then he sent me home to bleed. Again.

And I bled. Finally. But not enough.

Of course.

And what I had never ever wanted to do again, I had to do.

Perhaps there is a reason it didn't go smoothly. Didn't exit my body with ease. In fact no pregnancy, live birth or other, has ever exited my body with ease. Bleeding and done with

would have been too easy. Instead there were clumps to remove blocking the exit ramp. Clinging. Making a home? Settling in?

Or it means nothing. Absolutely fucking nothing and it is all just random and cells and luck of the draw. I don't know. But I do know my body ached, but more than ached. It hurt. Like really hurt. My lower back felt cut. Constantly. Like clawing to get out, which is ironic since it seemed so intent on staying put. Amazing that something so small can cause so much pain.

And so I would take my place on that table again. Last time I had a D&C, I remember being so mad and upset that the paperwork said abortion on it. That's the official medical term. The appropriate term. But this is a miscarriage I wanted to point out. No heart beat. I want this baby I wanted to say to the nurse handing me these papers. It didn't matter. Same this time. I am 48. Isn't this ridiculous? Who could have imagined this happening? I needed the recognition of my experience. But the table and the instruments don't care if you meant to be here or not. They don't care if you wanted the baby or are relieved. They are not more gentle depending on your motherly desires.

So back in the office in Santa Monica. To the room. To the table. The beige table that adjusts up and down to find just the right angle. And I couldn't help but wonder how often is

this room used?

I'm nobody special in this room.

Last time on this table I did not have Eli yet. Last time on this table I did not know what to expect. This time I knew I would feel faint, like I would fall and collapse and just needed an even space to lie flat, grasping and thinking if I could just get flat I'd feel better only to realize I was already lying flat. This time I knew it would suck, but like most things pregnancy related, I did not know it would hurt as much as it did. There was sucking and gurgling and too many sounds to try to ignore. And there was a kind and gentle Dr. whose calm demeanor screamed how emotionally delicate he knew I was. And there is still that moment dangling in your brain of NO WAIT!

We are wrong.

There it is.

Life.

And I kept waiting for him to stop, to be amazed and surprised.

But life isn't precious like that. It is at once fragile and robust.

But despite not wanting this baby, I wanted this baby.

I always want the baby.

It may have been the most painful of all of the pains associated with pregnancy I have ever gone through and I have had two C-sections. And again, I imagined this is how I die. Dr. B did not know why my lower back felt like knives clawing their way out. I heard him clicking and typing and checking his monitors for an explanation. My husband, once allowed in, (because just like my C-sections, they kept him in the hall separate until it was almost over) looked shell shocked and unsure of where to put his hands. I feel like I said to him, "Help me. My body is breaking." But I don't know if I said the actual words or just with my eyes, but he knew what I meant. We may have made this baby together, but it was clear that it was me this was happening to me and in his understanding in that, in his fumbling with his hands to hold mine I felt how singular an experience this is. I thought I had wanted him to make a scene. I thought I wanted him to demand to Dr. B that he make me comfortable, my Terms of Endearment "Give my daughter her shot!" moment. But as he stood there awkward in the awfulness of this, I felt loved and understood because he didn't pretend to understand. And I weirdly wanted to help him, to wrap myself around him. I loved him for not trying to pretend or feigning that this was happening to him too. And

this acknowledgment of our separateness connected me to him again.

Our marriage is quiet. Our marriage flows to fill in the cracks of the other. Our marriage sneaks in and snakes up wrapping into a tight coil. Never letting go.

And then we went home.

And truth be told, I was relieved. I was surprised by the relief, but still relieved. We can't have another baby. That's utterly ridiculous.

But relief grief is still grief. And I grieved for something I never planned and would never have chosen, but still will miss.

At home we made the kids dinner, probably mac and cheese, and read them books and tucked them in and walked the dogs and continued as we were.

Two, maybe three days later, we were at brunch in Santa Monica (always Santa Monica) with Jay's bosses and families when Jay was overcome by pain. He tried to put on a happy face but he just couldn't.

Kidney stones.

Fucking hell.

I drove him to the same hospital where I gave birth to our children and where they each needed to be taken to the NICU. We even bumped into our landlady from when we lived around the corner when we first began our life together, that again seemed like some kind of sign, of what? A time gone by? A history worth fighting for? I don't know, but I knew it was my turn now to take care of him. I drove him to that hospital twice that day, his pain so intense he had to go back, once dropping him off and rushing home as the children slept in their beds at 3am. I could hear a man wailing and retching as I watched my husband get out of the car and walk into the ER holding his side. Ridiculous to leave him there in such chaos, but the kids were alone. I briefly contemplated just driving away, just away, somewhere else. Island escape. But of course I'd never do that. That would be ridiculous. And we are not ridiculous people.

I could hear the wails of that stranger as I called Jay to check he made it inside okay.

The hospital sent him back home to me, the medicine they gave him barely scratching the surface. Night after night, now it was my turn to try to bear witness to my partner's pain as he lay in our bed trying to find comfort.

"Way to steal my miscarriage thunder," I offered in the dark of our bedroom.

The joke didn't land. He couldn't really hear me. He was concentrating hard on not falling apart it seemed. And I knew that I didn't really know what he was feeling and never would. That's the thing about marriage. A coupling of two individuals who become more than themselves without losing themselves. A bond that must respect the distance and not feel threatened by it. That's the dance.

He gets out of bed and I watch him pace like a wounded animal, clinging to something, the wall, the living room and back again, perhaps he won't hurt in the living room, but of course he does — anything, trying to outrun his pain.

"I don't think I am gonna make it," he says quietly so the kids can't hear. Benjamin's bedroom shares a wall with ours. It wasn't a dramatic overstatement (that's not who he is, that's my department) but rather the honesty of his current reality. I offered no solution since I didn't have one. He taught me that. I am always trying to solve everyone's problems. Sometimes you just can't and it is kinder to understand that. I watched comfortably from my side of the bed, my tragedy over. I was aware that there was nothing I could do except to be there. With him. As he had been for me.

I wouldn't pretend to know how it felt. I wouldn't pretend to know how to help, despite how uncomfortable that arm's length distance felt.

Together, we would wait for this too to pass.

View more of Rachel Schinderman's work [here](#).