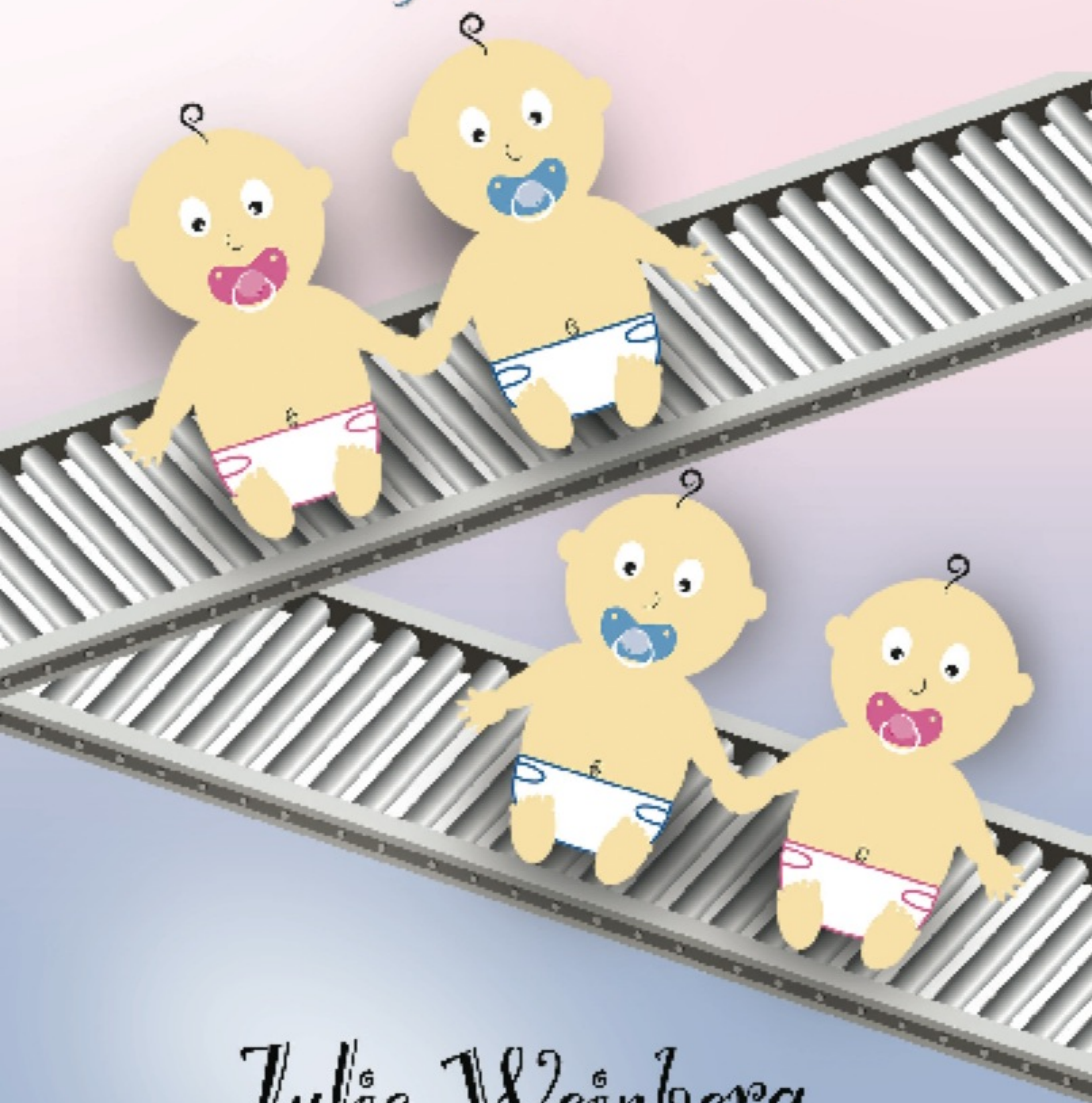


*I Wish There Were
Baby Factories*



Julie Weinberg



It's Washington, D.C. in 1990 and yuppies Lauren and Mack Weiss seem to have it all - great jobs, nice cars, and each other. All they desperately want is a baby to complete the picture. Laugh and cry your way through their five-year quest with infertility, genetic testing, adoption and more. Lauren's behind-the-scenes details of the legislative process will captivate you on their roller coaster ride toward parenthood. Feel hope, despair and jubilation in this true and inspiring story.

I Wish There Were Baby Factories

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First Edition

To Zack and Emma
For making it so worthwhile

And to Brad
For getting me through it

A story inspired by real life events

January 1991

With my feet in the stirrups and the doctor buried under the sheet covering my legs, I stared out the window and tried to conjure an image of me holding a cherub-faced baby in my arms. I could almost hear the baby's soft cooing.

"Ouch!" I involuntarily cried, jolted back to reality by the doctor's less than gentle insertion of the speculum.

Dr. Jackson tried to soothe my nerves with his deep, melodic voice. "Just relax, Lauren. This should only take a minute."

Right. How'd you like a cold metal stick shoved up your— I breathed deeply and tried to sink back into my daydream.

Dr. Jackson removed the speculum, inserted what must have been his entire hand up to the elbow and started poking and prodding my lower abdomen. "Everything feels normal. Nothing enlarged or out of place."

I would have responded, but I could barely breathe. Who knew a doctor could adjust your voice box via the vagina?

Dr. Jackson disengaged himself from my insides. "Go ahead and get dressed, Lauren. I'll be back in a few minutes to talk about what your next steps should be."

As I slipped off the cold, metal examination table, the paper loudly tore as it stuck to my butt. My brooding expression reddened in the mirror hanging over the sink. *God, I hope no one heard that.* I slipped into my new Ann Taylor suit, which fit perfectly over my petite frame. My long, highlighted curls helped soften my prominent nose and angular chin. I rarely focused on my looks though; I always knew my personality made me attractive, more than my face.

My lack of menses had prompted this visit to my GYN's office. I hadn't had a period since I'd gotten off the pill six

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months ago. But I wasn't pregnant, either, which was kind of the point.

My husband Mack and I had discussed the get-pregnant-now-or-wait question shortly after his birthday.

Out of the blue one night at dinner I said, "So... I've been thinking. What about having a kid? Now, I mean... or soon anyway. How do you feel about that?"

The anticipation and excitement that exploded over Mack's face could have been read from a satellite orbiting the earth. His stocky build and cool demeanor kept many people at bay, but anyone who knew him knew he was a big mush melon at heart. A conversation about kids would inevitably make him beam.

"Are you joking?"

"No, as a matter of fact I'm not. I'm not getting any younger. Hell, I'm more than a quarter of a century old now."

"You're almost twenty-six. Hardly do or die time."

"I know, but I'm ready for something big to happen. Something that makes me feel like a grown up. I've got a husband and a new mortgage payment and two car payments, and yet I still feel like a kid pretending to be an adult." I picked up my wine glass and rubbed at some unseen flaw on the stem. I sipped slowly before continuing. "Don't you think having kids will make me finally feel... well, old? Like an adult?" Although not acting it, I felt totally serious.

"Lauren, come on. This is a major decision. You're not talking about some unfulfilled need to nurture another soul or just wanting to carry on the family genes. Getting pregnant because you're bored with being young really isn't a good reason." Although Mack was eighteen months younger than I, he always came off as the mature one.

"And the sex," I said, trying to keep things light. "We'll have an excuse to have sex anywhere anytime. It'll be a blast."

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“Honey, you don’t seem to have really thought this through, at least not seriously.” He looked deflated, as if I had promised him the trip to Hawaii he’d always dreamed of and then declared it an April Fool’s joke. How many years of marriage would it take for a husband to understand his wife? Obviously more than the few we had under our belts.

“Mack, I’m being facetious... about the reasons anyway. Do you seriously think I’m ever going to say, ‘Mack, I have an aching pain inside that can only be healed by holding my own baby?’” I fluttered my eyes to drive home the point. My flip attitude was protecting me from something, though I wasn’t sure what. I also wasn’t sure why I was downplaying how much I wanted to be pregnant, especially with him. “Seriously, I’ve just been thinking a lot lately about how great it would be to start a family. And I don’t see any point in waiting.”

“Well you know I’ve always wanted kids.”

My eyes crinkled in quiet laughter as I thought what an understatement that was. “Exactly. Me too. I just didn’t know when, and I think now might be a good time.”

“So when do you want to start? I mean when will you get off the pill?”

“I’ll flush them tonight. Maybe you’ll even get lucky.”

He grinned. “Now that sounds like a *great* plan.”

That was six months ago and I wasn’t pregnant yet, which simultaneously bummed me out and pissed me off. I had planned out our lives very carefully and now we were six months behind schedule. That wasn’t acceptable. I had to take appropriate action—hence today’s doctor’s visit.

Waiting to hear Dr. Jackson’s sage advice, I thought about how much I loved my GYN. He’d introduced himself at my first appointment eight years ago by saying, “Welcome. Welcome. I’m DOC-tor EUUUU-gene JACK-son at your

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service.” His unique emphasis on the first syllable had made me smile inside.

His booming laugh had captured my trust, but as I looked at the poster hanging on the exam room wall, I thought it must be one of his jokes. It showed a picture of a developing fetus as it grew bigger and bigger inside a woman. And then it showed a picture of this little hole which, according to the poster, would become the size of a coffee can. *You have GOT to be kidding me!* Dr. Jackson and whoever else had thought up this baby-making business had some sense of humor.

My musings were interrupted when he knocked and opened the door simultaneously. “Nothing to worry about here. Your examination didn’t turn up anything unusual. You appear to be perfectly healthy. Sometimes it can take over a year for the body to get back to a normal cycle after getting off the pill.”

A whole year! But I want to have a baby this year! That’s what we planned. Mack and I made plans and stuck with them. Vacations, finances, TV schedules. We worked out conflicts and stayed the course. Waiting a whole year just wasn’t going to work for us. Dr. Jackson needed to figure out something else.

When I explained that to him, he raised one eyebrow. “Hmmm, I see.”

He wrote me a prescription for Prevara, then rattled through some directions and warnings. I only partially listened as I mentally patted myself on the back for persuading him off of his “let’s wait and see” stance. Mack would be so proud of me. He often failed to speak up when he wanted something, so he always seemed pleased when I did.

As I understood it, I would take the drug for five days and then within a week I’d start my period. Ten days after that I should be ovulating, so when Mack and I had sex, bingo! I’d get pregnant. So by mid to late February I should be with child, as

they say. *Well, practice makes perfect. I'm thinking a little practice might be in order for tonight.*

When I walked in the front door, I smelled Old Bay seasoning and garlic in the air. Mack was toiling in the kitchen, making my favorite dinner of steak with shrimp scampi. I glanced out the front bay window at the azalea bushes in our yard and the cherry blossom trees lined so perfectly down our street. We had been told their blossoms would explode with color all over the neighborhood soon. I couldn't wait to see them for the first time.

Mack, the world's most thoughtful husband, had poured me a glass of the cheap pinot noir to which I'd become addicted. I felt so lucky. How many girls snagged a husband who would gladly cook delicious meals without being asked while pouring copious amounts of intoxicating nectar for consumption?

Before both of my feet left the foyer floor, Mack hollered, "What did the doctor say?" He was standing in the kitchen with his red-striped power tie (the one we giggled over buying because it seemed absurd that he was qualified for such lofty adult apparel) flipped over his shoulder and a spatula in his left hand. A report lay on the counter. He must have been reviewing it between stirs.

Mack worked in real estate valuation and already rivaled the best in his field locally. When the Rockefeller Center complex went bankrupt in New York, a local partner with Price Waterhouse who was overseeing the bankruptcy convinced Mack to work as a consultant on it.

Financially it solidified our successful "dink" status (double income, no kids), and our newly built house stood as testament to that. However it also meant he woke at 4:30 a.m. on Monday mornings to catch a train to NYC and then was held hostage there until Thursday night—if I was lucky. The number of times they asked him to stay the weekend probably exceeded

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the number of times he came home. Frankly, I wondered whether the physical and emotional stress on Mack—who literally was expected to work 24/7/365—was worth it.

“Hello to you, too.” I set down my briefcase while kicking off my shoes, then headed to the bedroom to take off my suit and put on one of Mack’s old t-shirts that made me feel skinny and loved.

Mack shouted after me, “Sorry, Girlie-Girl. Hi-how-was-your-day-what-did-the-doctor-say?”

Grinning, I reappeared. “My day was fine. Thank you for your interest.”

I was a lobbyist on Capitol Hill for a small public interest group, and I lobbied mostly on federal debt issues. My job definitely paled to the glorified schmoozing you see in the movies. I didn’t even have a meals and entertainment expense account. The fast-paced environment kept me constantly on the go, which I loved, and sometimes I even thought my work made a tiny bit of difference in the world. “Basically the doctor said to chill out, relax and let nature take its course. But he also prescribed a magical pill that will get me to start my period.”

“So we should make love tonight?”

“Make love? Who the hell says ‘make love?’ No, we shouldn’t ‘make love.’ What we should do is have sex. Good, hard, dirty sex. The kind that leaves you tired and satisfied. I’m pretty sure I taught you all about that in my study cubicle at American.”

Mack just rolled his eyes. “You are too much.”

“Not quite the party animal I was a few years ago, but you’re no longer the stick-in-the-mud you were when we first hooked up either.”

“Longest month of my life.”

I smacked him upside the head. “Hey!” But then I put my arms around him.

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“Listen, if it wasn’t for me you would have flunked out your freshman year. I taught you proper studying techniques.”

“What? Taking off a piece of clothing every time I got a Russian vocabulary word right? That’s your world famous studying technique?”

“Absolutely. You passed didn’t you? And I still remember the important phrases: Ya tibya I’ublyu.”

Mack turned off the burner. “I love you, too.”

I innocently batted my eyes. “Will dinner keep?”

“It doesn’t have a choice now, does it?”

Mutual friends originally introduced us at American University, but because of how different we were, our first try at a relationship was short-lived. We got back together my senior year. By then I wasn’t always looking for the wildest party to go to and realized that spending an evening talking over some beers with friends could be equally satisfying. For his part, Mack had started drinking a little, which loosened him up, and since we both loved dancing, we spent a fair amount of time at Tracks nightclub in Southwest DC.

He pursued me relentlessly that year, always just happening to show up when I needed a ride somewhere. Heavy grocery shopping no longer required three trips when Mack and his car were around. I always got to class on time and weekend plans might include a road trip to New York or Philadelphia. I told everyone I was just using him for his car, but he grew on me and before the end of the year, we were engaged.

Friends freaked when they found out. First, because we were so young. Second because... well, this was the same guy I had compared all my bad dates to throughout college. People’s attitudes needed time to adjust. Surprisingly, neither of our families questioned our decision. They took it on faith that we knew what we were doing, and we certainly felt like we did.

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When I showed my roommate my engagement ring, her eyes shone full of hope. “I can’t believe you’re going to be the first of us to get married. And you’re marrying *him*! Just goes to show, absolutely anything is possible.”

I wasn’t sure that was the ringing endorsement I had envisioned, but I didn’t really care because I knew we were right for each other. We had the same goals and ambitions—work in career fields we love, make tons of money, and then retire early to travel around the world. Our morals and values were similar too: family first, do unto others, and gladly pay taxes to support needed social programs. And we both wanted children. At least two, maybe as many as four....

On our third date, after seeing Ghostbusters at the movie theater, we “shared” a pitcher of beer at the Campus Tavern. I remember he poured himself a glass but never touched it.

“I love movies like that,” I said. “Movies that both adults and kids can enjoy together.”

“Me too. I can’t wait to have kids.”

“Really? Most guys don’t admit to that.”

“Yeah. My dad has been really involved in my life and I want to be just like that for my kids. I want to be the dad all the kids want as the chaperone even though he’s strict. I want to teach my son to appreciate little things, like the effort a woman goes through to dress-up for a night out. Or teach my daughter why men do some of the things they do.”

I thought, Interesting examples. “I want to be a mom for all the usual reasons. Babies are so cute, I’m very nurturing, I like watching kids grow and develop. But can I tell you a secret? Want to know why I really want kids?”

He eyed me suspiciously. “Okay, I’ll bite. Why?”

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“Because I love playing board games! No adults I know will play with me so I need to have a couple of kids around for when the Scrabble board calls to me.”

Laughing Mack shook his head in mock dismay. “I want at least two kids... preferably three or four.”

“Four? That might be a bit much for me to handle.”

“I’d help you.” Our eyes locked for the slightest split second. My stomach flipped. Oh My God! He’s the One!

Of course we broke up a few weeks after that, but when we started dating again a couple of years later I still remembered the surge of that moment.

After last night’s sexual escapade, I felt very hopeful as I handed the Prevara prescription over to the pharmacist. I took the pill daily over the five-day course. As scheduled, I started my period and a week after that we were back to having sex every night with a ferocity that... well, felt great! To my absolute delight, four weeks into this cycle I still hadn’t started my period. Nor at five weeks. Now I was really getting excited. On the Friday of the sixth week I snuck out of work early to buy my first home pregnancy kit.

Standing in the family planning aisle of the CVS by my house, I stared at the various kits and read every word on each label. *No other brand is more accurate read e.p.t. I recognize that brand so they must be good.*

The one with the picture of the hopeful woman on the box touted *Unsurpassed accuracy for dollars less.* I discarded it immediately. *Who wants to worry about saving money on something as important as this?*

The pharmacist watched me closely so I casually ambled up to the Patient Information window.

“Can I help you?”

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“Yes, I think I’m pregnant and I want to buy a pregnancy kit.” Sounding giddy and girlish, I couldn’t keep the excitement from my voice. She couldn’t care less.

“Yes, well, all of our pregnancy tests are over there... where you’ve been standing... for ‘bout an hour.”

“Um, well... I’m trying to decide which one is the best one for me. I’ve been comparing directions, prices, and how easy understanding the results will be. Do I want a color change? A plus or minus sign? One has an 800 number to talk to a nurse with any questions. Do you think that one is the best?”

“Honestly, I think all of them work exactly alike and you can get accurate results with any of them.” She talked down to me as if I were a total idiot, but I was too wrapped up in the moment to realize she was making fun of me. So I thanked her for her help, spent the extra \$2.00 dollars for the 800 number and left the store confident that our lives were about to change.

Having read the box of every pregnancy test in the store for most of an hour, I now felt like an expert. I knew I had to wait until the morning to actually take the test, though how morning pee could be more conclusive than mid-afternoon pee was beyond me. So when I got home, I tucked the test into the linen closet and said a quick prayer that it would give me good results.

I woke up extra early the next morning. *Okay, here we go.*

As usual, I really had to pee so I kicked myself in the butt when I opened the box and discovered a huge insert with really tiny print on both the front and the back. *Expert my ass*, I thought, rolling my eyes.

Desperately praying I wouldn’t pee my pants, I read the directions and all the warnings. Bottom line, the directions were quite simple: pee on the stick and wait.

So I did.

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Next came the hard part: exercising five minutes of patience while the stick changed—or didn't change—colors. I couldn't decide whether I should sit and stare at it or cover it up and wait to be surprised. Not much into surprises, I sat and stared. And stared. And stared. Five minutes passed. I put the stick down, washed my hands and face and brushed my teeth. By then ten minutes had passed. Nothing changed. I reread the directions in case I had missed something critical. *Nope—pee on stick is pretty much it.*

I exhaled loudly. *Okay, then. I'm not pregnant.*

I gathered my thoughts for a minute before I woke Mack to share the non-news. *There's always next month, it's always darkest before the dawn, and all that crap. Deep breaths.*

I didn't want to upset Mack and he didn't like to see me upset. So I sucked it up and decided to try to make a lighthearted joke about it.

Feeling not at all into it, I pulled out my latest purchase from Victoria's Secret, a white teddy with pink garters and fishnet stockings. It took forever to get it on and adjust everything, but eventually I sprayed on some Obsession perfume, smiled at the mirror and headed back into the bedroom.

I crawled into bed and gently touched Mack's face. He opened his eyes and smiled at me.

"Well..." he asked expectantly.

"The bad news is I'm not pregnant, but the good news is the Pregnancy Fairy left this amazing outfit in my closet with a note saying it would do wonders for your desire to procreate. I had to wake you to see if it was true."

Disappointment clouded his eyes and he brushed one of my tear-stained cheeks before he pulled me closer to him and kissed me.

"I love you."



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