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IN AUTUMN

MARY K. RICHIE

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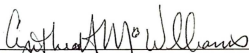


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In Autumn

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Foreword

This thesis includes fiction, memoir, and poetry. Three of the poems “For Weeks,” “A Memory,” and “But He Finds It Anyway,” represent hope, change, and ones ability to learn from the past and move on. The other three poems “Siafu,” “Addiction,” and “Fall of 1995, with my Grandfather,” all characterize death, uncertainty, fear, and hopelessness.

The memoirs have elements that echo the themes in the poems. “Mouse Trapped” brings opposites together by representing death, change, and hope. The second memoir, “Hot Legs,” has an air of uncertainty, but the dominant message is adaptation and self-reliance.

“In Autumn,” is a work of fiction that explores the larger themes of the entire work. “Mother Nature” is also a work of fiction and the beginning of a larger work in progress.

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In Autumn

As soon as I cross the border into Illinois, I feel like a kid again. I sit behind the wheel of my car and feel myself shrinking into the girl I once was. I wonder if someone will recognize me, not as I am now, but as the young girl who smiles shyly at the people my grandparents meet for breakfast every morning. My fear is that I never grew up when I left Illinois and went to school in Kentucky -- that it is all a dream and that my younger sister grew up and left me behind.



When Garrett asked me to marry him, I cried. He laughed at me and slowly reached under my arms and pulled me to him. I cried into his soft chest and wrinkled the back of his shirt with my fists. He rocked me like I was a child who had a bad dream. I never said yes. He took my tears for happiness. I gave him no reason to think otherwise. He pulled me away from him and kissed me on the nose. "This will be a story we can tell our kids and grandkids someday," Garrett said. He brushed the hair out of my face and put the ring on my left hand. I didn't look at it.



The wind makes me feel beautiful sometimes. Especially in the fall when the world outside prepares for a nap and breathes a little deeper. I stand outside, without my

shoes, feeling the wet-coolness of the stubborn leaves that are still wet from the rain days before. My skirt skims the ground, and the already dry, angry leaves cling to it in a desperate attempt not to be forgotten. I pick one up and hold it in the palm of my hand. It looks arthritic, and vulnerable. I close my hand and feel it break into tiny pieces. I release my fingers as the wind appears and takes the pieces away from me. I turn toward the wind and let it give life to my hair and skirt. It is at this moment when I feel beautiful. When my face and my body are not what draws attention, but the haunting movement of my hair and fabric and the leaves that move toward the same unknown destination.

I dream of having a hammock when the weather is calm like this. I imagine a place I have never been, with grass and leaves and two trees that stand far enough apart that I can tie my hammock to them. I will lie there in my hammock, before winter comes, and hear the secrets that are hidden by the cars and the lights and the sounds of the day. I can watch the leaves racing each other on the ground and the grass pushing through its autumn cover trying to reach the sun one last time.



Garrett would want to be with me in the hammock. He would plant the trees and make me the hammock himself if I asked him to. He would even try to listen to the trees to tell me what they say, but he wouldn't know. I would stare up at the tree with the buttercup yellow leaves and watch them fall all around us. He would hold out his hand to try to catch one of them. One would land at my feet, and another one would land on my

shoulder. They would never get close enough to him so he could catch one.

It's not that I don't love him. I can't really remember a time when he wasn't in my life. Am I capable of knowing what I want for the rest of my life at the age of twenty-two? Is there something I will want later in my life and be unable to get because he would be hurt by it? Am I all that he can ever want? Am I enough without the wind and the trees?



I remember seeing my sister, Stephanie, show off her ring and tell how her boyfriend, Frank, proposed. They sat on the floor of my grandparent's house; Stephanie in front of Frank, and his hands on her shoulders. The carpet beneath them was the same carpet we crawled on when we were babies. It was dark brown, shag, and Stephanie twisted it around her index finger as she talked.

"Well, Frank knew that Halloween was my favorite holiday, so he decided to do it then." She leaned back into his chest and tilted her head to look up at him as he squeezed her shoulders twice. She sat back up and continued twisting the carpet around her finger. "I was having a party at work and he said he had to work late and would meet me there. I was dressed in my Cinderella costume, of course, and Frank was going to be a... what was it, Honey?" she asked and looked back up at him.

"A cowboy," he said with a laugh.

"Right. A cowboy. So, there I was, knee deep in office talk when in walks this handsome man dressed as Prince Charming! Can you believe it? He rented a different

costume to surprise me!” she said, trying her best to make everyone in the room as excited as she had been.

“And I strolled up to her, got down on my knee and asked her to marry me,” Frank said, acting rather proud of himself. My sister shoved her hand out in front of her again and made her fingers dance. I was twenty then. She was only nineteen. There was not a trace of doubt on her face about whether or not she was making the right decision.



Garrett proposed to me two days before Thanksgiving. We had already made plans to spend the holiday apart since I wanted to go home to Illinois to visit my family and he wanted to stay with his family in Kentucky. He asked me to marry him the night before I left for Illinois. He said he wanted me to be able to tell the whole family about the engagement when I was there. I pretended to be excited.



My sister was divorced by the time she turned twenty-one. This will be her first Thanksgiving without her ex-husband. I drive to her house feeling like I am in a booster seat so I can be big enough look out of the window. There is not much to see along the roads in Illinois and there is always the fear that a deer will jump out in front of my car and end my life. The people who will find my body and my broken car will look at my finger, and at the ring that was placed on it the night before, and assume that I was happy

- that I had so much to live for.

I look on either side of the highway at the cornfields. I find comfort in the endless flat land that runs into the sky. There are always clouds in Illinois. The sky is bigger there. I look at the short brown stumps where the corn was. I feel like the cornfield - once full of potential and full of life. Then, people notice the life growing and decide they want a piece so I give the pieces of myself away. And soon, everyone has a piece of me but me, and I am empty and have to start over.



Stephanie notices my ring before I am in the door. “Abby, what’s that on your finger?!” she asks and lifts my hand to her face. I struggle to pull my suitcase in the door with one hand. “Garrett proposed to you! That’s great! I knew he would!” I set my suitcase down on the rug at the front door and hug my sister.

“I have to pee,” I say, trying to avoid talking about the ring and the engagement. I slide past Stephanie and walk down the hall to the bathroom. I sit on the edge of the tub, take the ring off my finger, and look at it for the first time. It is pear-shaped; I guess it is slightly less than a carat, with a platinum band. Exactly what I always wanted. I sit the ring on the edge of the sink and wash my hands.



I tell my sister I am going to grandma’s and grandpa’s and I leave my suitcase

sitting by the front door. I get back in my car feeling days from the womb, completely helpless. I drive through the town where I grew up. I look at the hills I used to sled down and the yards where I used to throw my bike down in the grass. I park at a dead end and get out. I stand for a moment and let the wind hit me. The wind is softer here than it is in Kentucky. I walk down the sidewalk, avoiding the cracks. There are some people outside on ladders putting up strings of Christmas lights. Some houses still have the Halloween decorations up. The skeletons hang in the trees. The Jack-O-Lanterns are shriveling and turning brown. I walk to my grandparents' house and open the gate in the back. The swing I had as a little girl still hangs from a tree. It's just a piece of wood with rope in either end holding it off the ground. Over the years the rope had worn down and been replaced, but the board never faltered.

I sit in the swing and kick at the leaves around my feet. I grip the rope and lean back, letting my hair drag on the ground. I hear the screen door of my grandparents' house slam shut and heavy slow footsteps come up behind me.

"It's been pretty this week. Your grandma and I have been sleeping with the windows open," my grandpa says. He stands with his hands in the pockets of his overalls. I look up at him and smile, kicking off from the ground so I can swing higher. My grandpa walks behind me and puts his hands on my back to give me a push.

"Garrett asked me to marry him," I say, looking up at the tree branch that is suspending me off the ground.

"Yeah? What do you think of that?" he asks.

"Not sure, Grampy. How do I know I'm supposed to get married? How do I know he's going to love me all the time?"

"You can't. And you can't know you'll love him all the time, either," he says. He pauses for a minute and continues to push me in the swing. "I fell in love with your grandma when she was sixteen years old. I was eighteen. I wanted to marry her as soon as she graduated from high school. I just knew I was going to love her forever," he says. I sat on the swing with my head turned around halfway so I can hear his story while he pushes me. "She wanted nothing to do with me. She told me I was wasting my time and her time thinking I wanted to be with her and no one else. She wanted me to leave her alone 'til I was sure I didn't want any other girl, ever."

"So, what did you do?" I ask, wondering how he got his happy ending.

"I waited. I waited for five years while your grandma turned away every boy that came to her door. I waited while she told me I was a fool not to be dating anyone else. I waited for that stubborn woman to come to her senses," he says, pushing me a little harder in the back.

"You didn't date anyone else?" I ask.

"No. I didn't. I told you. I loved your grandma. Still do. And I knew she would come around. I have a hunch she was testing me. She wanted to see if I would give up on her. She's always been that way."

"She tested you for five years?" I ask.

"No, Sweetheart. She *wasted* five years thinking I would break her heart," he says, as he walks around the swing and stands in front of me. I stop swinging and move the swing in a large circle. His hands go back into the pockets of his overalls. "She wasted five years of her life wondering what could happen. I can't stand here and tell you I never broke her heart. But I never did it on purpose," he says, looking over my shoulder

at the house.

"I'm scared," I say, slowing the swing down and looking up at him.

"You should be. But you gotta ask yourself what scares you more - being married or being without Garrett. I can't tell you what to do this time," he says. He pats me on the head as he walks around the swing. I hear his feet crushing the leaves as he walks slowly back to the house and slams the screen door again.

I sit there for a while, thinking about Garrett and marriage and my childhood. I twirl around in the swing twisting the ropes together. I twist the rope so tight my feet barely touch the ground, but I wait to pull my feet up. I lift my feet off the ground and tuck my knees up to my chest to make me spin faster. I get dizzy watching the colors of the yard stream together over and over again. When the ropes separate, I hear a crack. I fly backwards and my back connects with the hard ground. Pain shoots through my body as my breath shoots out of it. I lie there for a minute with my eyes closed, cursing the rope that held up the swing. When I open my eyes I realize that the rope didn't break this time. Directly above me are two pieces of wood hanging by the ropes. The pieces of wood are violently knocking into each other.



"I broke the swing," I say when I return to my sister's house.

"Grandpa has more rope in the shed. Did you tell him?" she says.

"No, Stephanie, I broke the board." My sister stares at me and erupts with laughter.

“Well, it’s about time! I guess the extra weight on that finger of yours is what pushed you over the limit!” Stephanie says, still laughing. I take the ring off my finger, put it in my suitcase, and feel lighter already.

For Weeks

His mom was there every morning to tell him
he was in a car accident and he's in the hospital.

People visited and brought him roses and set them
by the window next to a brown puppy

with a ribbon tied around its neck. For weeks, I would visit
as he lay in bed, and his mom placed the stuffed animal

on his stomach and asked, Do you know who gave you this,
and he shrugged and turned away, because he didn't know

the answer. Until the day his mother asked him and he sighed,
and pointed at me, as if he'd been answering all along.

Fall of 1995, with my Grandfather

He played golf every day and stopped
when his heart stopped. Then,
he slept for months
while machines did all the work.

That was the year
I learned to play golf.
I held his hand
and told him all about it.

We flew to see him
every weekend.
He never knew
we were there.
When he didn't get better
we waited
for nothing to happen.

Siafu

(Driving Ants)

They have no home to return to. Siafu constantly drive through the woods and villages leaving bones behind. Their Soldiers guard the path, side by side, pincers armed while their sisters pass swiftly along the road. Twenty million hunters destroy the living and consume what is left of the dead. Somewhere a man falls down beside a tree and takes a long drink before he picks a bottle under his arm. Siafu smell him before he hits the ground and shift their course. Drowsy from the alcohol, he closes his eyes. Quickly, without waking the man, they climb his elbow, his abdomen, his face. They crawl in his mouth, into his nose, in his ears. They close their pincers around his skin and pull off tiny chunks of flesh. In seconds the drunken man disappears under the colony. They devour him and leave nothing behind except clothes, bones, and booze. Days later and miles away a baby cries and the driving ants prepare to consume their next victim.

But He Finds It Anyway

At night, we arrive
at home, and I step
onto the porch and wait
for him to find the key
to unlock the door. I stand
between the door and the
light from the lamp post.
I cast a shadow on his hands
and the doorknob, so even if he
is able to find the right key,
he can't see where to put it.

Mouse Trapped

I have a routine every night: empty the dishwasher, load it, turn it on, and wipe down the sink, counters, and stove. It was when I was moving the appliances that I noticed them along the wall: little mouse droppings. Gasp - *No!* I looked around for the creature, thinking it was hiding in the corner waiting to jump on me. I did not see a mouse. My routine cleaning job escalated into a disinfecting storm. I bleached everything. The problem was I didn't know where the mouse was, or where it lived. But I was positive it would come back.

Over the next few days I discovered other places the mouse had been – in the silverware drawer, under the sink, and on the wooden shelf across the room. I took the same precautions as the first night; I cleaned everything with bleach.

The next day, I went to the store and invested in the “humane” mouse traps. They are rectangular boxes with a door that swings inwardly to allow the mouse entry, but it doesn't let them out. My boyfriend Antonio wanted to kill it, but I didn't. I wanted to take it far away from my house so it wouldn't be able to find its way back. I couldn't stand the thought of walking into the kitchen and finding a mouse smashed between a piece of wood and a thick metal wire.



I had used the humane traps before to relocate unwanted house guests. A couple of years prior to this mouse incident, there was another one in the same house. I did not

live there at the time, but Antonio did, and I was dating his roommate, Richard. I barely knew Antonio then and was content to keep it that way. Richard occupied all of my time and attention, and my energy went to making sure his very easy life was even easier. When Richard discovered that a mouse was in his kitchen, the responsibility to get rid of it fell to me. I bought the traps, set them out, and when the mouse was caught, I set it free on the back patio. Richard stood at a distance to view the mouse in the trap and would not touch the box. It took me a little while to discover that I was catching the same mouse over and over. I was setting it free, and it was coming right back inside the house. I finally got rid of it by taking it a couple of blocks away and letting it go.



When a mouse showed up again, two years later, I was not going to mess around. I bought three traps to cover all the bases. I took pieces of a Pop-Tart it had been nibbling on and stuck them in the traps. I set two traps on the counter, facing opposite directions, and one on the floor. The plan was laid out clearly: I would catch the mouse, drive it to a field or wooded area, and set it free. Nature would decide if the mouse was going to live or not. I would no longer be held responsible.

I continued to find little poop trails on the counters and empty mouse traps. I wondered why I wasn't catching the mouse. I began to move the traps to different locations thinking that would make a difference. At that point, I still hadn't seen the mouse; it was an eating, pooping ghost-mouse.

For some reason, the mouse was impervious to the delectable frosted strawberry

Pop-Tarts I had placed in the clear, private dining facilities. As someone who had successfully captured mice before, I thought of myself as an expert. I just had to be patient.

One night, I was on the phone with a friend, relaxing at the kitchen table. I began to hear strange noises, like paper crackling. Instinctively, my feet flew off the floor as I tucked my knees to my chest and inspected the floor beneath me. I soon realized the noise was coming from behind me and I turned around and looked at the wooden shelf, but the noise stopped. I didn't see anything. Then, I heard the noise again. I turned to see a long, thin tail sticking out of a white mixing bowl filled with miniature chocolate candy bars. The candy was shifting around inside the bowl. I screamed like a frightened little girl and ran for safety in the living room. Antonio looked up at me and waited for an explanation.

"Mouse, mouse, mouse!" I said pointing at the kitchen and dancing on my tip-toes. I was still holding the phone, taking comfort in the fact that I was connected to someone in a mouse-free zone. Antonio got up and fearlessly walked toward the kitchen; I followed closely behind. The mouse had climbed from the candy bowl by the time Antonio walked over to the shelf to get a better look. I jumped onto a chair.

"It's right here. It's a pretty big one," he said, bending down so his eyes were level with the shelf.

"Big? How big?" I asked, imagining a rat or squirrel.

"Well, for a mouse it's big. Really, it's just fat. It's just sitting there," he said implying that it was safe for me to climb down from the chair and look at it.

I decided to hang up the phone and go investigate the fat mouse that was raiding

my cupboards. I stepped off the chair quietly and walked slowly toward Antonio. He pointed to the side of the bowl; I bent down to look. The mouse was much smaller than I imagined. It had brown fur and huge black eyes that stared at me. I saw its chest move up and down as it inhaled and exhaled quickly. Antonio moved the bowl to get a better look, and the mouse disappeared behind the shelf, leaving behind more droppings. I took my original position on the chair as Antonio followed the mouse.

The mouse was able to go places we couldn't see, and eventually, it disappeared. Antonio continued the ground surveillance, and I searched from high on my chair. We didn't search very long before giving up. I don't know if I really wanted to find it. I just wanted to get rid of it. I picked up the large bowl of candy and dumped it in the garbage. I thoroughly cleaned the bowl and the shelf before turning off the light and exiting the kitchen.



I began to think about our first encounter with a mouse. Antonio was removed from the situation, apathetic about the mouse. I was much braver then, taking charge of things because I knew Richard wouldn't or couldn't. I eventually tired of making Richard's life easier. Gradually, Antonio and I became friends.



Less than thirty minutes later, Antonio and I were in the living room and heard

noises coming from the kitchen. I walked slowly to the kitchen and turned on the light in time to see the mouse disappear into the stove! It went into the hole below the drip pans. I was disgusted. The little fucker was living in my stove. Antonio picked up one of the traps.

“What do you have in them?” he asked. I shrugged my shoulders and looked down.

“Pop-Tarts,” I said, meekly.

“No, baby. You’re supposed to use peanut butter,” he said. “Put some peanut butter on a saltine and put it in there.”

“But it already ate some of the Pop-Tart. I thought it would want to eat that again,” I said defending my idea.

“Peanut butter,” he repeated and left the kitchen.

I disposed of the stale pieces of Pop-Tart and searched the cabinets for some crackers. I put huge globs of Jif peanut butter on some Triscuits and slid them into the traps. I placed the traps on the counters and floor again and prayed that I would catch the pest.

The next morning I woke up and checked the traps. To my delight, there was the mouse in one of the traps on the counter. I ran upstairs to tell Antonio of the victory.

“I got him!” I said, throwing my hands in the air like I had just crossed the finish line.

“Good,” Antonio said. “Don’t set it free around here. It’ll just come back.”

“I know,” I said, thinking of the best place to set it free. I went downstairs and moved the trap to the floor so the icky mouse wouldn’t be on the counter anymore.

While I was getting ready for the day, I thought of the perfect place to set the mouse free.

I picked up the trap with a paper towel and carefully carried it outside. I was extra cautious when I put it in my car. I could just imagine accidentally flipping the trap over causing the door to open. The mouse would escape into my car and hide under the seat. I was equally alert while driving with the trap on the passenger-side floorboard. I was afraid I would take sharp turn, the trap would roll and open, leaving me stuck in a moving car with a wild mouse.

When I reached my destination, I carefully picked the trap from the floorboard and placed it on the ground (while I was still in the car, of course). Slowly, as not to hurt the mouse, I turned the box upside down allowing the door to fall open. The mouse did not escape as quickly as I had anticipated. It remained in the back of the box, breathing rapidly; its big black eyes looking around. I lifted the back of the box a little to give the mouse some momentum. Eventually, it ran out and stopped just a few inches from the door. With the box, I nudged the mouse toward the cemetery.

I was proud of myself. The mouse was not harmed, and I found it a nice place to live that was quiet and spacious. I was eager to get home and clean the rodent-free kitchen. I set the trap on the back patio, just in case I needed it again. I left the other two traps in their original places to make sure there weren't any more.



I wondered how long I would have kept the stale Pop-Tart in the traps before trying different bait. I would have caught the mouse sooner if I had consulted Antonio

about which food would work best in the traps. I was already used to doing things on my own, figuring out everything myself, and not asking anyone for help. Richard would have been too grossed out to discuss what to put in the trap. Antonio instantly knew what the problem was and how to fix it.



The next day, I found fresh droppings on my counter tops. I moved one of the traps by the wooden shelf and the other to the spot on the counter where I caught the first mouse. I was tired of washing everything in the kitchen every day, and I was tired of cleaning up mouse shit. I wanted them gone.

Just before going to bed, I heard a noise coming from the kitchen. I went to investigate and found mouse number two caught in the trap by the wooden shelf. It was trying frantically to dig its way out of the plastic enclosure; the sound carried through the whole house. I felt bad about keeping it in the box all night, but it was late. I was not going to take the mouse to the cemetery until morning. I tried to sleep, but I could still hear the mouse scratching. I decided to place the trap outside on the patio between the concrete stairs and the empty trap I had put there the day before.

I was relieved that I had caught another mouse – hopefully the last one – and glad that I put the mouse outside until I could set it free. I prayed that there weren't any more mice in the house and that there weren't any baby mice living in my stove, wondering where their mommy and daddy were.

The next morning I got ready for my day as usual and went to retrieve my mouse-

in-a-box from the back patio. When I opened the back door, my jaw dropped and I froze. There was a trap lying in the middle of the patio, turned on its side, completely empty. I looked next to the concrete steps and the other trap was a foot from where I left it. I knew instantly what had happened. In the night, a predator happened upon the trapped mouse. In the struggle the box was moved, shaken, and possibly dropped. The mouse perished.

I walked back inside to tell Antonio of my devastating discovery.

"Maybe he got away," Antonio said, optimistically.

"Yeah, maybe," I said, but I didn't believe it. I pictured the poor little mouse kicking and clawing trying to get out of the box. A nearby cat heard the commotion and came to investigate. The mouse saw the cat and tried even more frantically to escape certain death. The cat, unable to work the trap correctly, batted the box around until the door opened, and it was able to reach inside and pull the mouse out. The mouse was eaten alive by a stray cat fed by my neighbors. Or worse, it was a snake that consumed the mouse while it was in the box. Then, unable to pull its head out because of the door, the snake struggled and flailed until it flipped the box over and the door fell open allowing it to escape.



After Richard and I broke up, it became apparent that Antonio and I were interested in each other. Our lives became more complicated because Antonio still lived with Richard, and Richard still wanted to date me. Antonio and I would see each other privately, secretly, not wanting to hurt Richard or cause problems, but eager to continue

on with our own lives and possibly find happiness with each other. Richard eventually moved out, and I moved in a few months later. He doesn't speak to Antonio or me anymore; he can only look at us from a distance.



Maybe the mouse did get away. Maybe the cat wasn't smart enough to catch the mouse and the mouse was able to escape. Maybe there was no snake. I struggled with the idea that I ultimately killed the mouse. Even though my intentions were good, I failed to factor in nature. I was aware that a bird or a snake might capture the mouse in the wild and consume it, but I was not prepared for it to take place on my back patio.

I didn't see any more mice after that. I still have one trap armed (with peanut butter) and ready to safely contain a mouse if the need arises. And if I catch another one, I'll set it free right away.

Addiction

She looks me in the eyes
and doesn't sniff
when she talks to me.
Her eyes are no longer
red and puffy - no bags
weigh them down.

It's spring here, everything
is green. I wonder if
it looks white to her,
like when people
in the desert see things.

I want to ask everyone
for their story. I want
to know their drug of choice.
I write my name
on the visitor's pass.

Sundays are spent beneath
a tent with ash trays
and benches. She offers me
a cigarette. I quit. No patch.
No gum. Quit. But she can't
stop on her own. She always loses.

Hot Legs

One night, I, along with two friends, decided to explore the downtown scene in Nashville, Tennessee. Usually, when we venture into the city, we have a planned destination, but on this night we were looking for a new place to go where we could get a couple of drinks and dance a little. I was unemployed at the time and living on my savings and bi-weekly visits to the plasma center until school started in the fall. My friends were a week away from payday and left with less than thirty dollars between the two of them. Going out and spending money was the last thing any of us needed to be doing.

It was a hot, sticky night. The humidity was so thick that even a breeze couldn't push through it. We walked down 2nd Avenue passing all the bars we'd been to before and the clubs that were charging a cover. While waiting for the WALK sign to glow so we could cross Broadway, we encountered a young woman wearing a lot of make-up and a mini skirt handing out flyers for a new club.

My friend, Keith, took a flyer from the woman and he held it up so Michelle and I could see and said, "Dollar Long-Necks 'til 11:00 and free cover with this flyer." Keith was usually the ring-leader of our outings because he was the most outgoing. He was always in search of something fun to do and some new thing to experience. When he had a plan to do something, others were rarely asked their opinion. He was showing us the flyer out of courtesy. This was where we were going.

We crossed the street and walked down the block to where the club was located.

A large man in a black shirt and sunglasses was standing outside. Keith handed him the flyer, he checked our ID's, and pointed up the stairs. The steps were dark and narrow. They had been painted several times but failed to hide the warped wooden planks.

At the top, the stairs opened into one large room. The bar was on the right side of the room just in front of the stairs. On the left were several high, round tables with glass amber-colored candle holders in the middle. The dance floor was around the corner from the stairs and flanked with two mirrors that reached from the floor to the ceiling. Just beyond the dance floor a few steps led to a small stage with a black metal railing, and more stairs disappeared behind one of the mirrors. The whole place was dark and smoky and aside from the bartender and the DJ, we were the only ones in there. The DJ played older songs from the 80's and 90's and would announce, after every song, that there would be a "Hot Legs" contest at midnight.

As we drank our beers, Keith began to talk to me about entering the "Hot Legs" contest.

"You have nice legs. You should enter. You'd win," he said, looking around at the three or four other girls that had made their way into the bar.

As far as body image goes, I'm pretty confident. Sure, I have areas that need a little work, but I would classify myself as being slightly above average in the body department. I'm tall, I'm thin, and I'd been told since I was a teenager that I have great legs. But I didn't need a stranger to judge me and I didn't want to put myself in a position where I might doubt myself.

"Absolutely not," I said, uneasy at the thought of standing in front of *anyone* and having them critique me on how I look.

"Come on. There aren't that many people here. I doubt any of those girls will sign up," he said, pointing to a group of girls on the dance floor.

"You could win \$150," Michelle said.

"I don't do stuff like this," I tell them. "Smart girls don't have to be pretty."

After I said that, I realized that smart girls wouldn't pass up a chance to win \$150 by simply showing a little leg. I needed the money. I also wanted to impress Keith and let him know that I could be just as much fun as he was. After a few more announcements, a little more encouragement from my friends, and a few beers, I got up enough nerve to sign up for the contest. The page was empty when I signed my name to the list. I prayed that my name would be the only one on the list.

By 10:30, the bar was still fairly empty, but we were having a good time dancing and watching the other people dance. I would look towards the DJ to see if there were any other girls who were signing up for the contest. I never saw anyone, so I started to feel a little more comfortable about the contest. I was able to relax a little and enjoy the fact that I might leave the club \$150 richer. I watched the girls on the dance floor wondering if any of them would be competing with me. Most of the women in the club were dancing with their friends or with their reflection in the mirror. They did not seem to pay any attention to the DJ or his announcements. To my horror, by 11:30, the place was packed, and there were 12 girls in the contest. I was a nervous wreck.

At 11:45, the DJ called all of the contestants to the stage. By this time I had lost my confidence. Did I think that I had better legs than most of these, girls? Yes. Would the judge think that I had the best legs? I was not so sure. The DJ said that they had something for us to change into if we were wearing pants. It didn't occur to me that I

would have to put on something different. I was growing more nervous by the minute. The guy who was working the door came up the stairs to collect those who needed to change. He led us downstairs to the first floor. We were taken to the very back of a narrow room where there was a bathroom. He handed one of the girls a blue, plastic Wal-Mart bag. I was terrified we would be given a bathing suit or a skirt that did not fully cover my ass. Two of the girls reached in the bag and each pulled out a pair of black shorts. Not wanting to be left with only extra smalls to choose from, I pushed forward and reached into the bag and pulled out the first thing I touched. I checked the tag – MEDIUM. Relieved they had a size that I could wear, I stepped into the empty stall to change.

The shorts were navy blue cotton about ten inches long. I changed into them, folded my pants, picked up my boots, and stepped out of the stall. I stared at my reflection in the mirror. On an average girl, they would simply look like the typical gym shorts we wore in junior high, but on me they seemed to almost vanish between my long torso and my long legs. The other girls in the bathroom were the itty-bitty girls who lived on cigarettes and Mai Tai's. No butts, no boobs, just skin, a little bit of clothing, and a lot of hair. They were cute, petite, and could have wrapped paper towels around them and still looked good. As I watched them twist and turn in front of the mirror, I was just thankful that I had shaved my legs before going out that night. I thought about what a fool I was about to make out of myself. The other girls seemed calm as if they'd been in a million "Hot Legs" contests before. I imagined them being seasoned veterans going to different contests around the state, trying to get the coveted "Miss Hot Legs" title and crown. I began to doubt myself even more.

Eventually, we were all changed and ready to go back to the bar. I carried my clothes and shoes up the rickety steps. As soon as I got to the top, there were guys standing around staring at us. I was anxious to get back to my table and get a little confidence boost from my friends before the contest started. As I walked through the line of guys, I felt a hand grab my butt. I stopped. *This is it*, I thought, *this is when I'm going to make some guy wish he didn't have any hands*. I imagined turning around to find some sloppy-drunk GI staring down at my chest or my legs, completely unaware that I have a face. I would step toward him, reach between his legs, and tighten my hand around his balls. I would wait until tears began to well up in his eyes before making him feel like a maggot, and ensuring that he think twice and maybe three times before attempting to put his hands on a woman like that again. I would tell him in a firm, yet polite manner that he should not treat women that way and that it was in his best interests to issue an apology for his actions. Any intervention by his friends would result in a tighter grip on his balls. I would release him and wish him luck in the future only after receiving my apology.

When I turned around to see who had grabbed my butt, I saw only a sea of faces, all looking away as if nothing had happened. I returned to my table and set my things down before ordering another beer. I was pretty drunk by this time, and the alcohol was the catalyst that brought me out of my shell. A few minutes before midnight, the girls who were in the contest were again called to the DJ booth and explained the rules. "This needs to be clean. You can't take anything off. You can't flash them. When we call your name, you go out there, dance, and walk to the other side."

We were crammed behind the large mirror in a booth above the stairs. I was

terrified I would have to go first since I was at the top of the list, but they started at the bottom so I actually went last. I knew no one would give me \$150 just for having nice legs. I watched all of the other girls walk on the stage, do their little dance, and walk off. I had my plan worked out; I was ready, but I couldn't stop shaking. I walked out like a diva and did some side-to-side hip movements before kicking my leg in the air, resting my bare foot on the rail, and dragging my hands up my leg slowly, drawing their eyes from my toes to my hips. I danced for a few more seconds before my time was up and I exited the stage, relieved it was over.

We were all brought on the stage for the voting. The audience got to pick the winner by applause. We stood in a line facing the audience as the DJ walked behind us and placed his hand over our head. I was again struck with terror. What if my two friends were the only ones who cheered for me? What if it's silent? I didn't even care if I won the money. I wanted to get off that stage before the people had a chance to *not* cheer for me.

The DJ randomly stood behind each girl as the audience cheered. I was unable to tell who got the most cheers and who didn't. They narrowed the contestants down to three girls. There was a skinny, big-haired brunette, a blond girl who everyone seemed to know, and me. I stood in the middle, standing out because of my height and my attire. I was wearing the blue shorts, a bright purple cami, and no shoes or socks. The girl to my left was short, slender, and wearing a little black and white dress and black heels. The girl to my right had long, platinum blond hair and the whitest teeth I had ever seen. She was wearing an aqua halter dress that was so thin her nipples clearly showed through the fabric, and silver high heels. Her name was BJ and she was a model and an actress.

BJ got my \$150. The girl to my left got the \$25 prize, and I got \$75 for second place. I also got to keep the shorts. I used some of the money to buy a round of Purple Hooter Shooters for my friends. But, somehow, I felt cheated. BJ appeared to be friends with everyone who worked at the bar; they all knew her name. Later, I saw her in a lengthy conversation with the mini skirt girl who gave us the flyer on the street. BJ also rubbed her tits on just about every man that walked in the bar. However, I was judged strictly on the appearance of my legs and not on my ability to give 140 men the impression that I was going home with them. I was proud of myself for climbing so far out of my comfort zone, and nearly taking home the prize. I know I have better legs than that BJ girl, and that is all that matters... or so I thought.



A couple of years later, I had just sat down to watch TV and *Fear Factor* was on. I don't really like that show because I think it has very little to do with fear and more to do with grossing everyone out, but the stunt they were doing looked interesting so I decided to watch for a minute. The people were dressed in thick suits and helmets to protect them while they ran across a room to retrieve a large box. Their obstacle was a very large Rottweiler that was trained to attack. The person in the suit was able to take a few steps toward the box before the huge animal that locked onto their arm and pulled them to the ground. The person tried to get up several times but was unable. Eventually, they just laid there and cried as the dog attempted to rip off their arm. Time finally ran out, and the dog was removed.

At first, I felt bad for the person, a young girl. She was all torn up and crying because the dog had attacked her and wouldn't let go. When she calmed down, I started to see that there was something familiar about her. I knew I had seen her somewhere. I kept staring and it finally occurred to me when they flashed *BJ: Actress/Model* at the bottom of the screen. I laughed, hard.

Mother Nature

Thursday, April 17, 2003

Shelly stops at the grocery store on her way home to get some beer and a two-pack pregnancy test. She hopes Henry won't be at home yet so she can take the test before he gets there. When she arrives at home, she doesn't see Henry's Black Lexus in the garage. She goes in the house, takes out a bottle from the six-pack, and runs upstairs with the pregnancy test under her arm as she twists the top off the beer.

Her period is only three days late, but it's never been late before, not since she started taking birth control pills. She is diligent about taking them too; every morning at 8:00 no matter what time zone she's in. After pulling the test out of the box, she reads over the instructions, pausing every so often to take another drink of beer. After doing as the instructions say, she puts the cap back on the test and places it on the counter. It takes three minutes to get the results. She washes her hands and glances at her watch. 5:43 *Three minutes to go.* After finishing her beer, she walks downstairs to get another. After returning to the bathroom, she looks at her watch, then closes her eyes and sighs. It has only taken her a minute to get another beer. 5:44 *Two more minutes.* She wants to peek at the test, but instead she walks into her bedroom and sits down on the edge of the bed. *A minute and a half. Please be negative. Please be negative.* The words are said over and over in her head willing them to be true. Another glance at her watch tells her that two minutes have passed. 5:45 *One minute.* Agitated, she stands up and begins to pace the room. She chugs the rest of her beer and goes back downstairs for a third. When she returns to the bathroom, she looks at her watch. It has been three minutes. She takes a

long swig from her bottle and reaches for the box. She picks up the test and compares it to the picture on the back of the box. Two lines PREGNANT. One line NOT PREGNANT. Her test looks just like the one in the picture. There are two distinct pink lines. *Pregnant*. She pours the rest of her beer in the sink and throws up into the toilet.

By the time Henry gets home, there is no evidence of the pregnancy test in the bathroom, or anywhere else in the house. She is relaxing on the couch when Henry walks through the door.

Henry enters quickly and takes little notice of his wife before he begins sharing his new found knowledge.

"Doug called a few minutes ago. They postponed our trip to Uganda. We won't be leaving for two weeks. They haven't even set up the bases, yet."

"For the surveillance? All we really need to know is how many of those kids have measles and how many don't. The kids need the second shot."

Henry and Shelly work for the Red Cross. For the last two years, they have been traveling to Africa as part of the *Measles Initiative*. They give measles vaccinations to the children in many of the African countries where measles run rampant and kill many of the children.

"Well, the people with all the money want to make sure everything is being documented before those kids actually get help," Henry says.

"Does that mean we'll have to postpone the second round of vaccines, too?"

"Maybe. They want three months to gather the information before we start doing any kind of follow-up."

"Bastards. I thought technology was supposed to make everything faster. It

sounds like they're complicating everything. What are we supposed to do when we get there?"

"Same as before. Help the *bastards* collect their information."

"We finished that first round of shots two months ago! Where were they then? Come to think of it, where were they when we *started* giving the shots?"

Henry just listens. She continues her rant for several minutes asking questions she knows the answers to and feels more frustrated by the second. Henry notices she is a little more agitated than usual. Her movements are quick and short, her voice a little deeper. Something is wrong. Something else. He looks at the table beside her and sees the bottle of beer. She only drinks it to wind down or to calm down. When Shelly finishes, Henry crosses the room to where she is sitting and picks up the bottle of beer. He takes a drink and holds it as he walks over to the stereo and turns it on. The last CD they had listened to was Elvis, and it was still in the CD player. He hits the skip button until he finds the song he wants and turns back toward Shelly. He sets the glass on the table and offers his hand to her.

"May I have this dance?" he asks, bowing slightly.

Smiling, she slides her palm into his allowing him to pull her to her feet. He wraps his arm around her, and she rests her head on his shoulder as Elvis sings "Can't Help Falling In Love." He wants to know what is bothering her, but he knows she won't tell him if he asks. If she wants him to know, she will tell him when she is ready. Right now, it is clear she isn't ready.

"I hope we'll be back in time for Lisa's wedding," she says, absentmindedly.

"We can come back whenever you want." She nods her head, and they continue

to dance close together. "Jailhouse Rock" plays in the background.



The next day, Shelly makes an appointment with her doctor. With her international travel schedule so unpredictable, Dr. Franz is flexible and is usually willing to see her at a moment's notice. She tells Shelly she can see her at the end of the day.

"I think I'm pregnant," Shelly blurts out when the doctor enters the room.

"And what do we think about that?" Doctor Franz asks.

"Nothing. I want it removed. I didn't want kids. I don't want kids."

"First things first; let's get a blood test and make sure," Dr. Franz says and calls a nurse in to draw Shelly's blood and send it to the lab.

"Let me do an exam while we wait for the test to make sure everything else is OK. Are you going somewhere again?"

"Uganda, in two weeks."

"How is everything going?"

"Slow," she says, tempted to start her rant all over again for Dr. Franz.

"Put this on," she says, handing her a gown, "and I'll be back in a couple of minutes."

Shelly undresses and puts on the gown. She feels violated by the potential baby growing inside her. This isn't what she wanted. She felt the same way the night before when she got the results of the pregnancy test. Then she took the second test right away thinking she had done something wrong the first time. She held the second test in her

hands and watched as the lines appeared. *Pregnant.*

She knew before she took the test that she was pregnant. And she knew right away that she didn't want it. Her life is exactly the way she wants it to be. She's successful, she has a great husband who adores her, and she is completely free to do what she wants whenever she wants. A baby would end that – for good. Instead of saving the lives of millions of children, she would have to raise only one.

Henry would never know. It was clear to her that this is something she could never tell anyone, her own deep, dark secret. Last night, she decided she wouldn't tell Henry anything until she knew for sure, from the doctor, that she was pregnant. Now, she thinks that the right thing to do is to keep him in the dark.

Dr. Franz knocks on the door and enters followed by the nurse.

"Congratulations! You're going to have a baby!" the nurse says in an excited tone. Shelly just stares at her.

"That will be all, Elizabeth. Thank you," Dr. Franz says to the nurse in a stern, threatening tone. The nurse hands Dr. Franz the paperwork and leaves the room. "I'm sorry about that," Dr. Franz says to Shelly. Shelly nods her head and looks up at Dr. Franz.

"So, I really am pregnant?" Shelly asks.

"Yes. I can give you the name of a colleague. If you decide to terminate the pregnancy, he can help. I would recommend taking a couple of days, maybe the weekend and thinking about it before you make a decision. Talk to Henry," Dr. Franz says. Shelly nods again, reassuring Dr. Franz that she won't make a decision right away. Dr. Franz writes down the name of number of the other doctor and hands it to Shelly.

When Dr. Franz finishes the exam, Shelly makes a move to sit up, but Dr. Franz gently pushes her back down. "This is going to be cold," she says, and squirts gel on Shelly's stomach. Dr. Franz puts a microphone up to Shelly's stomach and right away Shelly hears a muffled but unmistakable, *thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump*; rapid beats of the baby's heartbeat.

"Is this necessary?" Shelly asks, wondering why the doctor is listening to the baby.

"It's my job, Shelly," says Dr. Franz. "I have to do everything for you that I would do for any other patient." Shelly is done. She wants to get out of that room. She sits up and reaches for her clothes.

"I've got to go," Shelly says, implying that she has urgent business elsewhere. Dr. Franz takes her cue and steps out of the room, leaving Shelly to change back into her clothes.



As soon as Shelly is out of Dr. Franz's office, she calls the doctor to schedule her appointment for the termination.

"As soon as possible," Shelly tells the secretary.

"We're pretty booked for the next week," the secretary says.

"Is there nothing you can do?" Shelly asks, thinking that she couldn't possibly wait a week before getting this taken care of.

"Well, the only other option is to come in on Monday and wait to see if there's a

cancellation. We usually have at least two every day, but there's no telling when it might happen. You may have to wait all day."

"That's fine. I'll be there Monday," Shelly says, and hangs up the phone. She has the whole weekend to live with the baby growing inside her.



Thursday, May 4, 2006

"Honey, I have a confession to make. I stopped taking the pill two months ago," Lisa says, over breakfast, a little uncertain about how Kevin will react. His eyes brighten.

"Does this mean you're..." he asks, rushing over to her and putting his hands on her waist.

"No. I'm not pregnant," she says, playfully swatting his hands away. "But I want to start trying now."

"Sounds to me like you've already started trying," he says, jokingly.

"So it's OK? We can try to have a baby now?"

"I think it's a great idea. Do we need to do anything... *special*?"

"You mean other than have sex?" she laughs. "I don't think so. I talked to Dr. Adrian and he said for me to stop taking the pill, and it should happen in a few months."

"Well, let's get on that," he says, mocking a serious tone. He looks at the clock. "I've got to run. I'll see *you* tonight." He kisses her and gives her a wink before leaving.

When she hears his car start and pull out of the driveway, Lisa jumps up and does ballet leaps down the hall to her bedroom. In her closet, she digs through the bottom until

she finds what looks like a cake box, and pulls it out. She sets the white box on her bed and pulls the top off. Inside is a tiny, yellow newborn hat, a pair of yellow booties, and a white outfit for her little boy or little girl to wear when they come home from the hospital. She lays the clothes on the bed and rubs her hand over them, feeling how soft the fabric is. She reaches for a pillow and walks over to the full-length mirror on the closet door. She places the pillow under her shirt and presses it down until she is satisfied that it looks real. Turning from side to side, she admires her reflection in the mirror and rubs her fake belly. She waddles over to the phone and calls Shelly.

"I told him," Lisa says, masking her excitement to give her sister no evidence as to the outcome of the conversation.

"And? How'd he take it?" Shelly asks, preparing for the worst.

"He was all for it! He thought I was already pregnant!"

"Good. Now go and stand on your head or whatever they tell you to do to get pregnant," Shelly says, lightheartedly.

"I'll let you know as soon as I know, *Aunt Shelly*," Lisa says, and tells her sister goodbye before hanging up the phone.

She lies down on the bed beside the baby clothes and rubs them again before folding them up and putting them back in their box. The rest of the morning, she walks around with the pillow under her shirt.



Monday, April 21, 2003

Shelly arrives at the doctor's office before it even opens. She waits in her car until the door is unlocked and walks inside to the desk. She explains to the secretary who she is and what she is doing there. The secretary remembers her and hands her a clipboard with a stack of papers on it.

"Have a seat. Fill those out and bring them back up here. I'll let you know if there's a slot for you," the woman says.

Shelly is only there for three hours before there is a cancellation. The secretary calls her to the desk and tells her that they'll call her name shortly.

By noon, Shelly is back at home, trying to forget about the events of the past few days. It's over. She did the right thing. She keeps hearing the same sound over and over in her head: *thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump*. The heartbeat.

**Friday, June 1, 2007**

"We found something on one of your ovaries," Dr. Adrian says. Lisa has gone in for her annual appointment and is not prepared for this kind of news.

"What? What does that mean?" Lisa asks.

"It's a cyst. I would like to do some more tests."

"What does that mean?"

"It could be nothing. It is common for women to have ovarian cysts. Sometimes they can go away on their own. This one is a little bit larger than most, so I'd like to do

an ultrasound and get a better look at it.”

“So it could be nothing?”

“It could be nothing,” he says, smiling at her. “I just want to be sure.” Dr. Adrian begins to tell her how cysts are formed while he pulls out the ultrasound machine and squirts cold blue gel on her abdomen.

“Have you had any pain?”

“No.”

“Have you noticed a change in your menstrual cycle?”

“Yeah, I stopped taking the pill like you said. It’s not so predictable anymore.”

“Mmm hmm. There it is,” she says, looking at the monitor. “It looks to be about the size of an orange.” Dr. Franz points to an image on the screen. Lisa looks at the monitor not really sure what she’s looking at.

“That’s big, right?”

“It’s not the biggest I’ve seen, but it does concern me. I’d like to go ahead and schedule you for surgery. We’ll just take it out and get a biopsy. That way, we’ll know for sure if it’s something to worry about,” he says, wiping off Lisa’s stomach with a towel.

“Like cancer.”

“Yes, Lisa, like cancer. It is very rare for someone your age to have ovarian cancer.”

“And if it is cancer?”



Lisa drives home in shock. She doesn't bother returning to work. She calls the school and tells them she won't come back today. She drives home in silence, thinking of the thing growing inside her. Thinking of what it could mean to her future, her life.



Monday, June 18, 2007

When the doctor leaves, Kevin follows him outside and asks him more questions. Lisa feels like her life is falling apart. She hates herself. She wanted kids right away and she decided to wait. It was Kevin who convinced her. Instead of starting a family as soon as they were married, he wanted them to "enjoy each other for a few years" before they brought a child into the mix. Lisa thought that was romantic. Now she hates him, too. She wants to tell him that it's *his* fault. She wants to blame him so that he can't blame her for ruining their lives. Kevin shakes hands with the doctor and walks towards the room. She turns her head away and closes her eyes. His hand touches her arm and she can feel him staring at her. If there's pity or hatred in his eyes, she doesn't know. He kisses her forehead and sits down in the chair next to her bed. *Please, just leave me alone.* The words form in her head but are unable to escape through her mouth. A tear rolls down her cheek.



Wednesday, June 20, 2007

"Your sister called. She needs to talk to you," Henry says, when Shelly walks in the door.

"I'll call her when I get out of the shower," Shelly says, stretching in the foyer after her morning run.

"You might want to call her now," Henry says, in a serious tone.

"Is everything OK? Oh, does she have *news*?" Shelly asks, playfully, knowing her sister had been trying to get pregnant.

"No, it's not that. Just call her."

Shelly picks up the phone and dials her sister's number. Kevin answers.

"Hey, Kev, is Lisa around?"

"She just went to take a nap. She said to tell you to come over when you get a chance. She needs to talk to you," Kevin says, deliberately not giving Shelly any information.

"Kevin, what's going on? Is she OK?" Shelly asks, getting irritated.

"OK then, see you later," Kevin responds despondently, and hangs up the phone.

As soon as she gets off the phone with Kevin, Shelly's mind starts racing. Clearly, it's something bad, or they're playing a joke, or maybe she's scared, or she's changed her mind, or Kevin has changed his mind. Shelly is driving herself crazy thinking about her sister and why her sister needs her.

Shelly grabs her keys and runs out of the door, neglecting to tell Henry what is going on. The two sisters live less than five minutes from each other. Some days, when it's not too hot, Shelly will jog over to her sister's house during her morning run and

convince Lisa to run with her. “You need to get in shape for the baby,” Shelly has told her. That usually convinces Lisa to join her.

Shelly doesn’t bother to knock when she gets to Lisa’s house. She walks in and sees Kevin in the kitchen.

“Where is she?” she asks, walking past the kitchen into the living room. Kevin follows behind her. “In the back?” She walks toward the bedroom without waiting for him to respond.

When Shelly enters, Lisa is lying in bed with her eyes closed, and Kevin walks over and puts his hand on her shoulder.

“Shelly’s here,” he whispers and leaves the two women alone.

“What’s going on, Lisa?” Shelly asks as she walks over and sits beside her sister on the bed. Lisa strains to sit up and looks down as she talks to her sister.

“About a month ago, they found a cyst on one of my ovaries...” Lisa starts and tells Shelly about her visit to the doctor. Shelly listens in awe as her sister recounts the last month of her life and the worrying and the fear. “I know you’re probably mad that I didn’t tell you, but I couldn’t. I felt that if I told you that it would make it real – like it was really happening – and I wasn’t willing to accept that.”

Shelly reaches for her sister’s hand and nods, unable to say anything to comfort Lisa.

“I had the surgery two days ago. The cyst, it was cancer. They think they got it all. They had to remove my ovaries,” she says and begins to cry. “I won’t be able to have any kids, Shelly. They took my ovaries. They took them both, and now I can’t have a baby.”



Shelly sits with her sister and holds her as she cries. For a brief moment, Shelly envies her sister. Lisa won't have to worry about the pressure of having a child. Everyone will feel sorry for her, but no one will blame her or think any less of her because she can't have a baby. It's different when it's not a choice. People can accept that a woman *can't* have children, but they don't want to hear about someone like Shelly who doesn't *want* to have them.

At the same time, Shelly knows her sister envies her. She is physically able to have children, has even gotten pregnant before, but has no desire to carry and raise a child.

Shelly thinks about her pregnancy four years ago, and how easily she let it go. Shelly would give anything to be able to trade places with her sister. She wants to be able to avoid having to go through that again. She knows that Lisa would hate her for terminating the pregnancy if she ever knew. And she wonders why things turned out like they did. Why she's the one who can have children she doesn't want and why Lisa can't have children she wants.