

Waiting

By Jocelyn Johnson

In winter the bones of the garden are stark lines where snow melts into gravel paths. I am simple too; my body lean under layers, stripped down to its most basic elements. Thirty-one years old and my eggs leave the sachet of my womb, one by one, like clockwork. I should retire my birth control, I think. It has been seven consecutive years of relative safety. Tear colored pills, dialed out from a pink plastic shell; pastels are all wrong for the brown and white winter landscape. Life is a miracle. What am I waiting for?

I am more than old enough to be a mother, older than my mother when she made me. Mature, married. I am ready, on paper. So I research, under comforters, near fires on Sundays. I read *Misconceptions* by Naomi Campbell and dial up friends who are already mothers. I listen in their phone voices for clues to Motherhood. They are divided; they talk to invisible toddlers in the background. I hang up thinking: my life is full enough, if not fulfilling. How can I squeeze more in?

Spring surprises me and I feel better. White petals, sweet scents bring visions of minuscule hands and feet cradling an umbilical chord. Maybe motherhood is a primordial dream dropped into my head by Mother Nature. Who am I not to listen?

It is time to plan babies, I tell myself. I plan the way I plan errands or an art lesson. I imagine a schedule of getting big and round and taut at the belly, then wildling myself down again with karate or Pilates. My program of study is elaborate, 18 or more years before graduation. I will be a master of Breastfeeding, of Play, of Parent Conferences. A sequence lies clear and irrevocably before me if I only take the first step. I pencil in a month to get pregnant, and then change it like re-scheduling a trip to the beach.

Orange ditch lilies light up the yard; summer has arrived. Everything at once needs weeding and mulching. Baby copper heads camouflage themselves under leaves rotting on the ground. I weed, I mulch. I hide inside, behind fans, to escape the heavy wetness of the yard. On the talk shows, in the movies,
Babies cry too much.
Babies cause wrinkles.
Babies are cute as buttons.
Coming into the world, babies tear women open, making them into mothers.

It rains for three weeks and the torrent breaches the dam on the pond at the bottom of our yard. Water flows over an area of irregular rocks. I wake to the sound of rushing water and distant sirens. Despite my regulating pills, I am overflowing too. My period is unrelenting. Finally, a specialist tells me the cause: a cluster of fibroid tumors. One growth is bigger than my uterus; it balances on a stalk behind my womb like a balloon. Maybe you won't be able to get pregnant, he tells me while I'm still under the paper robe, at least without surgery. Or maybe, if you manage, the baby will come too soon. Or maybe everything will be just fine.

The slant of light is different when I go outside again.
It is suddenly fall. The light hits lower on the body. The foliage remains green and in place, but not for long. Out the window there is already a shower of leaves, right there among the greenness. Soon, everything will fold in on itself, hunker down, and sleep.

I don't know if I will be a mother.
I don't know what type of mother I will be.
This isn't about me exactly.
I have retired my shell of birth control; their meek tints are too weak against autumn's palette.
I am open to possibility.
Now all there is left to do is wait.