



MAGICAL THINKING

I don't know what I feel about it. I mean, I appreciate the concern, but it also made me feel weird. The woman's voice reminded me of this social studies teacher I had in middle school, Mrs. Jefferson, low and calm and clear. Even when we were talking about things like racism, sexism and genocide. I kept waiting for her to laugh like Mrs. Jefferson could, with this deep rumbling laugh that always made me feel safe. But of course the woman from the sperm bank, Melissa, didn't. She wasn't calling to make me feel safe. She was calling to alert me, to let me know that the rate of miscarriage with the donor I'd chosen was unusually high. In the last six months, since they first listed him, seven women had miscarried before seven weeks. I'm not sure if she included me in that number. I did report it, but now that I am sixteen weeks into my first real pregnancy, it feels like miscarriage was too strong a word for what happened back in October one week after my third injection and first implantation.

Now, if I were to lose Cynthia, I don't know how I would handle it. I recognize this feeling isn't going to get all that much better even after she is born. It may be the essence of parenthood. But I've decided I'm not thinking about parenthood, about the baby herself, until I can touch her. Until then it is a special kind of dream and a very precise kind of reality I'm living one day, hour, second at a time. Her name is part of the dream. The cream I rub on my belly is part of the reality. I decided this before I tried again.

But when Melissa from the sperm bank told me about all this—about how they were going to pull this donor until they learned how my pregnancy and that of the other woman who is still in gestation a few weeks ahead of me turn out—I suddenly had this very odd feeling, like I was floating above myself and looking down at myself at the same time and also looking down

at all the other women who were carrying or aborting half-brothers and half-sisters to this child who is so privately, so uniquely and only mine. Even if I refuse to imagine her at this time, I experienced a whole different mode and depth of knowing when I saw all these other women carrying babies as close genetically to each other as she was to me.

I mean when you go to a sperm bank, you have to realize that sperm is like money, it gets handled by a lot of people but is essentially impersonal. It's what you use it for that gives it meaning. There was a joke law recently passed in Maryland that defines every egg and sperm as a person, and suggests we make it a crime to waste a single one. And then there are these laws they're wanting to pass with no sense of humor where you force an ultrasound probe up into the vagina of a woman who is already feeling violated by life in the deepest way. Are they going to pass a law that embryos and fetuses can't leave the womb when they damn well please too?

These questions are all easier to think about than those seven women who, *at the very same time as me*, are using the same sperm douche as me, and are waiting, just like me, for something absolutely unique to happen to them. I think of those mass marriages Reverend Moon used to conduct, the aerial views you could see in *National Geographic*, so you were just concentrating on the pattern, like you would a herd of gazelles circling to escape a cheetah. There's a distance at which life looks redemptively orderly. Inhumanly so.

There were only two things I really cared about when I chose the sperm donor. I wanted somebody who seemed resilient, who'd already had some challenges in his life and had been able to bounce back. And I wanted to know he was stone cold sober and chemical free when he jerked off. I called specifically to ask about that. How complete was the drug panel? How often and when was it given? I wonder what the other women were looking for—and whether, when they lost their first dream of motherhood *that* was what they saw themselves as losing: a particular hair color or texture, physical build, an IQ, a curriculum vita, sobriety or can-do-ness. Or was it some barely formed sense of their new self they saw swirling so vividly in the toilet bowl or soaking through their sanitary pads? Someone who finally had exactly what she needed to be the person she wanted to be—and then losing it. When they wrapped themselves in their own arms, crying, or refused to do so—who were they comforting or ordering to buck up and get on with it?

I called my obstetrician after I talked with Melissa from the sperm bank. Dr. Laverne is great. She just suggested I come in for my next regular