

## THE GOODY BAG

by Tamara Palmer

I am 10 weeks pregnant and sitting like an island in a sea of bellies. All around me joyful couples share intimate smiles and tummy rubs. I miss my husband.

A nurse leads me to an office for the intake interview. I confidently answer no to question after question about my husband and my respective family histories: no cardiovascular disease, no history of unstable mental health – all healthy and clear. I'm thrilled at how smoothly everything is going and realize that my chances for a healthy baby are looking simply fabulous.

Next the nurse presents me with a bright yellow and blue goody bag chock-full of samples of pre-natal vitamins, flyers announcing pre-natal yoga and birthing classes, tours of the hospital, a journal detailing the play-by-play development of our embryo as it will become a fetus.

I sit back and close my eyes. When does the shift happen – embryo to fetus? When will this mass inside of me be a real baby? I vow to be good about taking notes in this journal. Perhaps I will give birth to a girl and will have the honor of giving the journal to her when she is ready to become pregnant and renew the cycle of life.

Cradling my goody bag, I am escorted to stage two of the doctor's visit. Along the way I relish the congratulations bestowed upon me by nurses, billing clerks, the receptionist – everyone is glowing for me. I am glowing for me! Next: the scale. I step onto it, and yup, I am five pounds heavier than I was just 10 weeks before. The nurse assures me that the weight gain is healthy and that it will all come off in the end. In the meantime, baby needs food and that means milkshakes for breakfast. If only I hadn't started out 15 pounds overweight. My New Year's resolution of "getting my sexy back" had been going strong with a brand new gym membership and fewer daily calories. I thought

my new summer wardrobe would be a size smaller; now it will be maternity clothes.

So here I stand in the doctor's office watching the scale hover just under 169, as if to save me from the terribleness of 170. I feel the tops of my thighs pressing into one another. It will all come off in seven months, I remind myself, and it will all be so worth it.

After the pap smear my doctor rolls out the ultrasound machine. I'm ecstatic! I wasn't sure that I'd get an ultrasound on my first visit. I can't believe that in a moment I'll see my baby. God how I wish my husband could be here with me. Earlier in the week he had been called out of town to be with his mother. Her multi-year battle with melanoma had resulted in a sudden seizure and the discovery of six brain tumors. While he sits vigil at her side in Chicago, waiting for the doctors to share encouraging news, I'm on a gynecologist's table 1,000 miles away in Colorado. I will be with him tonight. My flight leaves in a few hours. I'll bring him my goody bag and we'll delight over the surprises inside as we hold hope for his mom's full recovery.

"There's your baby." My doctor points out a speck on the monitor, not much larger than an almond. A flush of happiness courses through me. It's so tiny, but so real. I haven't invented it. I really am pregnant and there's the proof. No tubal pregnancy. I have a baby inside of me and my worries quickly fade away.

"Of course it's too early to decipher the sex yet," she adds. Everyone knows that, I think to myself, anxious for more interesting information. "I don't think you're as far along, though, it seems more like seven weeks," she continues.

I take a deep breath. I don't want to be only seven weeks pregnant. I can't bear the thought of five more weeks of morning sickness. At the same time, I'm not surprised at the miscalculation. My cycles are longer, more like 35 instead of 28 days, and I've always been suspicious of the delivery date. Being only seven weeks pregnant instead of 10 will push my baby from a Libra to a Scorpio, and being the avid astrologer that I am, I worry more about that than anything else. A water sign won't match as well with my husband and my fire and air signs. A Libra would be perfect.

"I can't detect a heartbeat," the doctor continues. "I'll need to do a vaginal ultrasound."

As she lubricates the scope, my frustration mounts. My research has taught me that heartbeats often aren't detected until eight weeks, so this means I have to come back next week to truly experience my moment of joy. I don't have the patience to wait another week. I need the good news to share with my husband's family tonight.

My doctor is silent as she gyrates the scope around my cervix. She mentions the missing heartbeat again; this time, though, the energy in the room shifts. Her solemn look puts me on guard. When she gently lays her fingers against my bare forearm I begin to panic. "I'm not sure that you understand." She takes her tone down a notch. My heart palpitates. "You've miscarried."

The words hang out there in the air, floating and drifting, trying to make their way into my consciousness. Miscarried? How could I? I'm pregnant. There's a baby forming inside of me. BabyCenter.com has been sending me weekly e-mails about how my lentil bean had grown to the size of a kidney bean, and was now the size of an olive. A shower of anger, sadness, guilt crashes over me, calling forth tears from a deep, primal well that I didn't know existed. My doctor leaves me to go in search of a doctor or nurse who can provide a second opinion. Alone and half-naked on the cold metal table, I grasp for air while fighting back convulsive tears. The dim light of the examination room does a poor job of blanketing me, as I shiver in the thin veneer of the hospital gown, feeling grief rush down upon me. I pray harder and harder that this is all a big mistake.

What about the goody bag, the congratulations? I look at the clock. It's nearly noon. I've been here since 9:30. Why didn't they start with the ultrasound and then just send me on my way? Why the build-up? Why the fucking congratulations? Two and a half hours of congratulations for nothing. Just a moment ago I was worried about the sign. Never mind my early musings God, Spirit, whoever's out there; I'll take a Scorpio, just let me have my baby!

All I've succeeded in doing is getting fat and being sick for a month. Then there's the acid reflux, painful nipples, constant nausea and hunger. For nothing, all for nothing. We've picked out names, lined up house projects, cancelled vacations - all for nothing. I skipped a trip to Morocco for this! Two and a half hours to find out that my little Lentil Bean is dead; my child will never be.

I think of all the people I told about the pregnancy that I should never have told - all the people I intended

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to tell after the appointment, who would now never know. I remember back to the previous Monday and how the nausea had hit a new level, and I could barely sit up straight in my chair at work. Was that when it happened? Was that when Lentil's heart gave up? Could I have stopped it? I should have started my prenatal vitamins sooner. I should not have eaten that lox sandwich that I craved so badly a few weeks ago, and I certainly shouldn't have had another two days later. How could I have been so careless? How could I have let this happen?

My doctor returns with a nurse who will provide a "second opinion."

"I'm sorry we had to meet like this," the nurse says by way of introduction. My doctor begins the second ultrasound, and they are both silent as they watch

the monitor for long minutes. I lie frozen, holding my breath, desperate for a more positive opinion. The nurse merely says, "I'm sorry," as she too lays her hand upon my arm before leaving the room. When she's gone, my doctor turns on the lights.

"This is normal," she tries to reassure me. "For women over 35, 20 percent of first pregnancies result in miscarriage. You did nothing wrong." She continues on and on with statistics and facts, most of which I already know, but all I can think about is having to tell my husband.

"You can let the miscarriage happen naturally," she explains. Exactly when it will happen she wasn't sure; in fact, sometimes it can take as long as five weeks. She tells me that I'll be bathroom bound for three to four hours when it does, and that I'd better have super maxi pads around. "If you begin to bleed before the plane boards tonight, don't get on it," my doctor advises. I picture myself sitting in a bathroom stall at the airport for three hours, watching blood gush from my body like a period on steroids and begin sobbing all over again.

The doctor then mentions something about a suppository that initiates a miscarriage within 12-48 hours of being inserted in the cervix. The chances of it working are around 50/50. If it doesn't, I will need a D&C: dilation and curettage. I've spent decades being careful with birth control to avoid the horrible abortion decision, and here I am pregnant by choice, yet being advised by my doctor to have an abortion to remove what my husband and I just spent more than a year trying to create. How can my baby be dead? Maybe the heartbeat will appear next week. How does the doctor know for sure?

No one told me that if you miscarry you need surgery to remove the "conception material." On top of it all, I still have to get pregnant again if I want a child. And who's to say that I won't miscarry again? If I miscarry after 20 weeks I have to deliver the baby. At nine months it could be a stillborn. Then there's crib death. How do women do it? How do they get the courage to continue the human race? I'm not sure I have it in me.

"Go be with your family," my doctor advises. "Call us next week if it hasn't happened and we'll schedule a D&C."

I walk out of the doctor's office disgusted that the goody

bag is weighing down my arm. I still have to call my husband. My legs shake and I harshly wipe away the tears that won't stop streaming down my cheeks. I shirk the "hello" eye contact of strangers, putting myself in a virtual tunnel between me and my car. How can I call him when I can't even pull myself together? I feel selfish for needing to tell him, selfish for needing him to comfort me when so much more is at stake for his mom. I dial. Voicemail. I dial again. Voicemail. On the third time I leave a message. "It's me. The appointment didn't go well...", I gulp back my tears and take a deep breath. "I need to talk to you."

Overcome with severe road rage, I somehow drive across town to my office without causing an accident. My co-worker, who has had a miscarriage herself, suggests I buy Depends and wear them (and she isn't joking).

It's now 2:00 and I haven't eaten all day. I'm amazed to find that I'm not starving and nauseous. Are the pregnancy symptoms disappearing already? I drive to my local deli, and when the clerk instructs me to have a nice day I nearly tell her to go to hell. Isn't it obvious to the entire world that it is far, far from a nice day?

Hours later my husband finally returns my voicemail. He just awoke from a nap. It's 4:00 in Chicago. He'd been up for 30 hours straight. When I hear his voice I break all over again. Later he tells me that when we spoke, he was already the saddest he thought he could be.

Over the next week my hormones begin to settle, the nausea and sore breasts disappear as though they'd never been, and suddenly I'm not eating all the time. A friend tells me a story about a woman who was in a situation like mine. This friend of a friend went back to her gynecologist a week later and they discovered a heartbeat. I rush to the drugstore to buy more pee-stick pregnancy tests, and then begin to accept my fate as the bulls-eye is only a faint Robin's egg blue. My hormone levels are plummeting. Each day I feel myself come back into my body a little more.

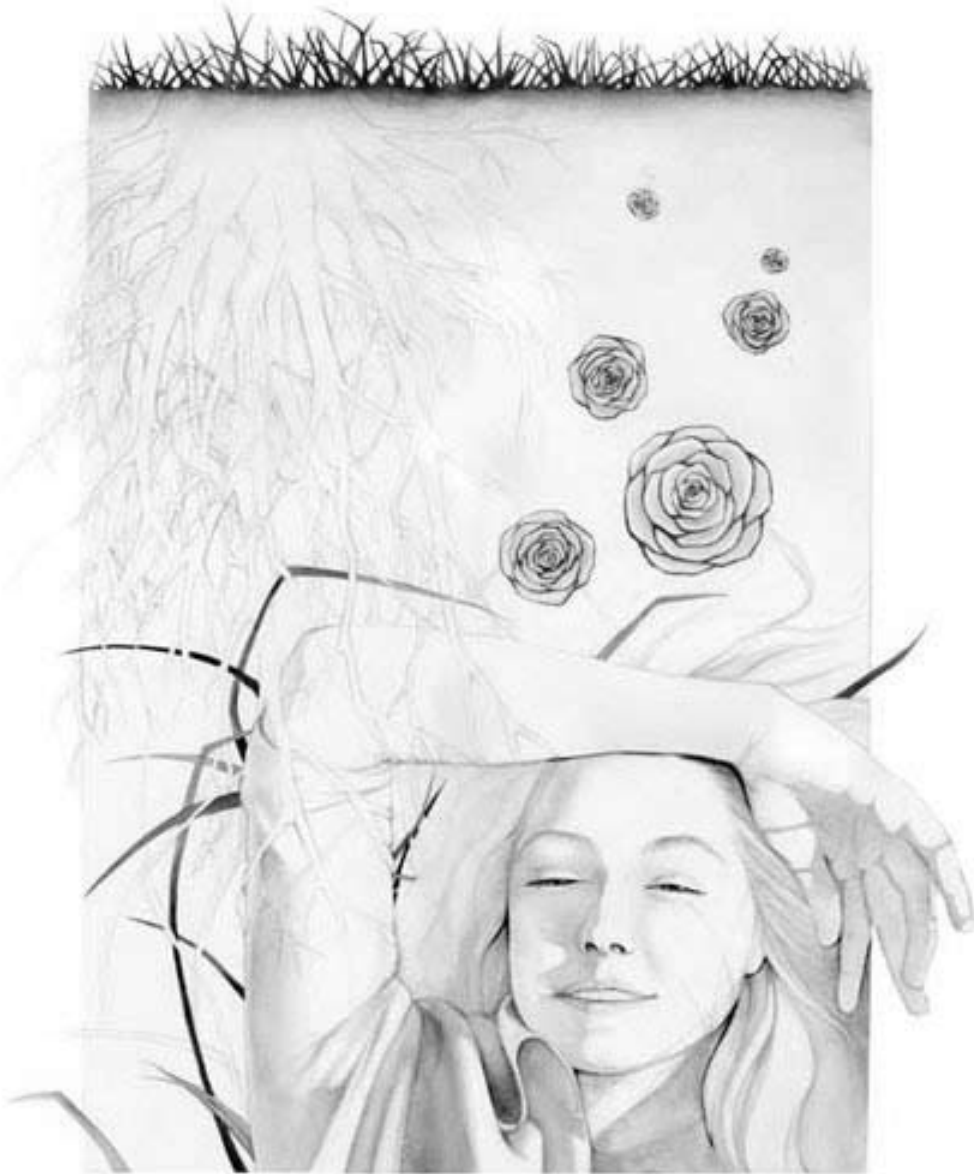
My mother-in-law has a miraculous turn-around, and after two surgeries in one week, is resting back at home. I have 20 pounds to lose and a bit more anger and frustration to excise. I think that I'm over it all, and then I spot a pregnant woman and feel a quake deep inside me. Yesterday I learned that an acquaintance's due date is October 6 - mine would have been October

9. I had to excuse myself from the room.

For now all of my printed Internet research, and the congratulations cards from family and friends are all tucked away inside the goody bag, which is stored in the guestroom closet, which will someday be my baby's room.

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