

THE DOCTORS MAP MY MISCARRIAGES IN HIEROGLYPHICS. My patient chart reads simply: "Gravida VI, Para 0 (Ectopic I, SAB V)."

Let me interpret.

ONE. Surprisingly, I'm not surprised by the first one. I've read a stack of library books and know the statistics. At least one in three pregnancies terminates in miscarriage. So, as with most things in my organized life, I dispatch the probability quickly and efficiently. Early in the pregnancy. Almost painlessly. Not much worse than a bad period. Statistic out of the way, I can now move onto the real thing with little fuss or muss. I map out the following year according to the next projected pregnancy. Dressed in a stunning pair of comfortable stretch pants for that night's party, where we had planned to announce our good news, I say to my husband, Richard, "At least I can drink tonight."

TWO. He nearly kills me, this one does. And I want him to. I want to quietly bleed to death along with him. But the doctor carves him out of me in time to save my life, assuring me that the scars will be minimal. One in my belly button, one hidden in my pubic hair and one small incision showing directly over the fallopian tube where he'd gotten stuck. *You've seen my thighs*, I think. *Do you really think a scar is going to wreck my modeling career? Do other women worry about scars at a time like this?*

THREE. Good news. After three miscarriages, the doctor graduates me from Spontaneous Aborter to Habitual Aborter. I'm not fond of the terminology, but Miscarriage isn't much better, sounding like an antique horse buggy that's thrown a wheel. It's like Misstep. A minor Whoops. At least Aborter, while smacking of a conscious decision, conveys the gravity of the situation. Now that I've made a habit of spitting out fetuses before they can cling to my uterine wall, technology can intervene in nature's grand puzzle. After three miscarriages, the medical establishment agrees that a problem might exist. Tests can be ordered after the third strike, but not before.

My husband and I are blood-typed, karyotyped, everything but daguerreotyped. I advocate strongly for Richard to suffer the humiliation of masturbating into a sterile cup, but the doctor insists the test isn't necessary. As long as we are conceiving, he assures me, the problem does not lie with deformed or malfunctioning sperm. No horny-toaded six-tailers, nuh uh. The problem is me, although

my doctor can't diagnose why my uterus continues to throw tantrums instead of sharing her room. The doctor sends me packing. "I can no longer help you," he says. "You need someone with more expertise."

FOUR. My friends look at me like, "Why the hell do you keep putting yourself through this?" They can't know it has nothing to do with prolonged suffering. It's all about hope. I understand families waiting for their MIA sons to return from Vietnam decades later. Hell, I can understand waiting for World War II sons to return in the new century.

Hope is the worst part. I can't crush it, suffocate it or bleed it to death. It starts the second I climb off Richard and there is no sign of the condom. In over a dozen years, we have never had a condom practice magic tricks before. It takes us awhile to find it. The squashed, latex baggie is wedged so far inside me that I can't reach it. Our laughter is hysterical: giddy and terrified. Richard uses his long fingers to fish it out. We stare at the deflated, wrinkled mess. Hope is born. A cosmic sign delivered by a renegade condom. Perhaps we've been trying too hard to control things. The miracle will happen when we least expect it. But this realized hope, documented by a blood test, is soon extinguished, and we wait for the next omen.

FIVE. A blip. A mere burp in my social calendar. I don't even call in sick for this one. I don't call the doctor. I don't tell my mother. There is nothing anyone can say. A friend tells me to check out Christine Northrup's book on women's health. Dr. Northrup informs me that miscarriages—and ovarian cancer—are the result of unresolved psychological issues. *Brilliant*, I think. *My miscarriages are caused by the fact that I haven't resolved the issue of not being able to bear children.* At least Dr. Northrup confirms my doctor's assertion and my belief that the miscarriages are my fault. Dr. Northrup combats menopausal symptoms by eliminating chocolate and wine from her diet. I know just where I want to shove a fudge brownie.

SIX. The new doctor gives me pink pills, lovely like childhood candy. Richard and I hold the bottle up to the light. The pills are enchanting, round and squishy. They will turn my womb into a hospitable, puffy pink cloud where any sane fetus would happily and obligingly nestle. The pills have the added benefit of turning me into the bitch I have always wanted to be. I have plenty to be pissed about. I have had a Popsicle stick scrape my uterine lining. The test is supposed to be performed twice for accuracy, but my doctor says she's sure a man instigated that rule and we'll leave it at one. I can now pronounce and spell words like hysterosalpingogram. The test names should be tough to articulate, given their pain.

One must suffer the right to use them. Their terminology should not be bandied about with ease.

Normal, normal, normal results. "There is no reason you cannot have a child, Mrs. Munro," my doctor tells me as she reviews my bulging chart and fills out the prescription. How odd. This woman who has explored every possible crevice of my body is calling me Missus. You'd think we'd be on a first name basis after our intimacies.

Richard tells the entire planet that I'm pregnant again, feeling luck in a Christmas pregnancy and having faith in the pills. But the doctor phones after she reviews my blood test and asks "Are you bleeding yet?" All we are left with by the New Year is a tiny felt stocking purchased for \$1.19 at the local drugstore. "I can no longer help you," my new doctor tells me. "You need a specialist." I sense that I have betrayed her, shaken her belief in the medicine she preached.

SEVEN. I fill out a stack of forms in the specialist's waiting room, charting the erratic course of my pregnancies. "Number of miscarriages" is followed by a blank. I look up at Richard, the pen hovering. We are suddenly, ludicrously unsure of the number. Unlike the doctors and their cryptic Roman numeral codes, we've lost track. Richard says, "Five." Simultaneously, I write, "Seven." Then I realize I've had six and I've already projected the next one.