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Professor McKnight
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But Two Negatives Equal a Positive

Oh my God. Oh my God. OH MY GOD! This cannot be happening.
Tears surged down my face, pelting my bare thighs. Two different brands, two different stores, two different bathrooms. Same results. *Are you frickin kidding me?! The second one only confirmed the first and the first only confirmed what I'd recently begun to suspect.*

How? I kept demanding. How could this happen? Okay, the how wasn't the mystery. This wasn't supposed to happen. Not now.

I must have sat there for a long time, numb. My head and limbs felt far too heavy to get up, my brain incapable of forming intelligent thought, eyes closed, head tilted backward, positioned awkwardly against the tiled wall behind. At some point, my eyes flickered open to the glare of a recessed flood light directly above.

Was this the Universe's idea of a sick joke? A test of some kind?

I stared into the white hot light. Mesmerized by the orb, I consented to it cauterizing the tears, scorching my corneas.

What words of wisdom might help here? I needed something. Anything. When life hands you lemons, make lemonade? What doesn't kill you will only make you stronger?

A shoulder angel whispered, "No one ever has to know."

"There *are* options," the other chimed in.

Activity a few feet away briefly interrupted the conversation only I could hear.

“But could she go through with it? Could she live with herself afterward?” the first asked.

“Dunno. She never thought she’d be in this situation,” the second answered.

I closed my eyes and gently rubbed the black blobs out of my vision. I dug the other contraption out from a small brown sack at the bottom of my purse and discarded them both in the receptacle mounted in the stall.

“A little different than the typical trash thrown in there,” a shoulder angel observed.

“It is ironic,” the other agreed.

Go away, I told my shoulder angels. I don’t like you anymore.

I pulled myself together and made it to the sink. The reflection in the mirror wasn’t kind; twin mascara ruts flanked each side of my face, eyelids swollen and naked, the whites bloodshot and raw. The splash of cold water stung my pores. Stalling, I wandered throughout the store and tried to come to terms with this new reality. My loitering terminated in the baby section.

How will Scott react? What will people think? What are we going to do? I tried to put myself in his shoes. We . . . will there continue to be a ‘we’? I just didn’t know . . .

I slipped into the house and quickly scanned the rooms. Scott was alone in the kitchen, cleaning out the refrigerator. *Damn, I had bad timing.* I quietly crossed the room and erected myself alongside the sweaty Tupperware and condiment containers sitting on the counter.

I crossed my arms and erupted, "You were right."

He backed out of the frig and shut the door, giving me his full attention. "About what?" he asked.

Be strong, I told myself, and do not cry.

The instant our eyes met mine started to well up with tears; I looked down and away, focusing on a few stray dust bunnies gathering in the corner. I hesitated. Scott sighed impatiently; he hated to be interrupted in the middle of something. Briefly, my eyes met his arched brows then darted back to the corner again. *For Christ's sake, my brain screamed, he's your husband not your father!* I took a deep breath and purged, "You were right about me being pregnant." I stole another glance; his expression was impossible to read. I took another breath and elaborated. "When you suggested it earlier, I thought you'd lost your mind. But then I got to thinking . . . the dates, not feeling well. I still thought you were nuts, but I took a test. Two actually, and they were both positive."

Just then, the patter of footsteps getting louder interrupted my confession. "Mom, can I have some crackers?"

"Sure, buddy." I handed him the box, trying to buy us more time alone. "Share with your brother and sister, okay?"

"Okay. Thanks, Mom!" and back to the living room he went.

Scott's silence was unbearable. I forced myself to look directly into his deep blue eyes.

"I haven't cheated on you," I offered.

"I wasn't thinking you did," he countered calmly.

"You weren't?" My brain couldn't comprehend. *How does a man with two surgically cut vas deferens not suspect his knocked up wife?*

“You remember the numbers the doctor told us,” he said.

“Yeah, I remember joking about our odds of having another baby being greater than winning the lottery.” *And asking if I could do the honors*, I recalled. (After all, dads were given the option of cutting the umbilical cord after a baby was born; it seemed like a perfectly reasonable request to me.)

“I can’t believe I figured out you were pregnant before you did,” he said. “What kind of woman are you?” He was teasing, but I failed to see humor in the situation.

“The kind of woman who is done with that part of her life,” I belched, sounding defensive. “The kind that gave birth to three babies in 33 months and likes eight hours of sleep a night. The kind that is done changing diapers and washing bottles and already got rid of every bit of baby stuff we’ve ever owned.” I’m sure he was sorry he asked. “Why would being pregnant even cross my mind?”

If he answered I didn’t hear him. My brain was busy cranking out reasons not to have this baby: *because I was done with that part of my life, because I finally owned clothes that were stain-free, because I was a frazzled, overwhelmed mess when the kids were babies. And because I was tired of feeling like my sole purpose on this earth was to be someone’s wife or mother. What about me? When was it my turn?* I stopped, realizing Scott was watching me shake my head back and forth.

“Scott, I can’t start over. I don’t want to. They’re all finally in school.” Guilt overwhelmed me. “And you know people are going to assume I had an affair. Everyone knows you got a vasectomy.”

“I don’t give a shit what they think,” he said. “Ultimately, it’s your decision and I’ll support whatever you decide, but I think we’re in a better position now than when we had the first three. Things are better now, right?”

It was true; we weren’t exactly living the high life, but we weren’t nearly as broke as during those early years. And I couldn’t remember the last time we had an argument.

He continued, “I’d say I’m more mature now than at 25. And more patient.” I nodded. “Care, it’s not like you’re going to have three babies again. Just one.”

Also good points. Wait a minute—what the hell just happened? Since when was he the voice of reason? That’s always been my job!

“Come here,” he said, gently pulling me into his protective embrace.

Wow, I thought, dissolving into a blubbing train wreck, I had prepared for a whole slew of reactions, but that wasn’t one of them.

Exhausted and relieved, I agreed to let the idea of a fourth child marinate a while.

I knew myself pretty well; I was capable of talking myself into or out of just about anything. I had been known to rationalize, justify, or just procrastinate until someone decided for me. But I wasn’t a fan of indecision either, and the gravity of what Oprah called a ‘defining moment’ weighed heavily on my mind and gnawed at my brainstem. During downtimes, my shoulder angels reappeared to duke it out; one would throw out a legitimate objection and the other would counter with an equally valid rebuttal.

In the shower: “She has no baby necessities; it would be absurd to start from scratch.”

“She learned the difference between a necessity and a gadget the first time around.”

“Has she looked at the prices of the stuff? This is going to cost a bundle.”

“It doesn’t have to be brand new; there are always garage sales and second hand stores.”

At a stop light: “Another child is less than ideal in a three bedroom home; the boys are already sharing a room.”

“Maybe it’s a girl. Her daughter has always wanted a little sister.”

“Yeah, till she actually has one.”

“People make do. Years ago, babies slept in dresser drawers.”

In line at the grocery store: “A new baby will totally mess up the whole birth order dynamic.”

“It will. There will no longer be a middle child.”

“The older kids may resent the baby.”

“Maybe they’ll be old enough to remember the experience of having a new little brother or sister—being helpers, teaching new things, reveling in all the firsts.”

At night in bed: “She lives in a time where women can choose. She doesn’t have to blindly accept whatever card life throws her.”

“She considered all her options; she feels too often people try to control every aspect of their lives. That’s not life, that’s a spreadsheet. The bumps in the road are there to teach things—about life, about adversity, about herself.”

“But she said she doesn’t want this.”

“Well, it’s not always about getting what you want. She wants chocolate all the time. Wait, that’s a bad example.”

“But she said she was just starting to get her life back.”

“It’s true that the timing isn’t convenient. But have you noticed that things have a way of working out pretty terrific, when given the chance?”

“Wait, does this mean she’s having a baby?”

“She’s decided; they’re having a baby.”

“I still can’t go to sleep.”

“Maybe it’s because you consume too much caffeine.”

“Maybe. Or maybe it’s because I can’t turn off my brain. How is it that he can be laying next to her snoring sixty seconds after his head hits the pillow? She’s been laying here for more than an hour.”

“She’s gonna have to get up to pee soon anyway, so she may as well get used to it.”

“Hey, what were all those girls’ names we had picked out? Do you remember?”

“Oh, the girl names were a piece of cake! We found lots of names that we loved. It was the boys’ names that were tough . . . they had to sound masculine, but not too macho.”

“Hmmm, I wonder where she put that name book.”

Shut up! I scolded them. *I’m trying to fall asleep. Maybe I’ll look for the book tomorrow.*

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