



**DETRANSITION,
BABY**

A NOVEL

**TORREY
PETERS**

DETRANSITION,
BABY

A NOVEL

Torrey Peters



ONE WORLD
NEW YORK

Detransition, Baby is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2021 by Torrey Peters

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by One World, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

ONE WORLD and colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Hardback ISBN 9780593133378

Ebook ISBN 9780593133392

oneworldlit.com

randomhousebooks.com

Designed by Fritz Metsch, adapted for ebook

Cover design: Rachel Ake

Cover art: Moopsi

ep_prh_5.6.o_co_ro

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[By Torrey Peters](#)

[About the Author](#)

CHAPTER ONE

One month after conception

THE QUESTION, FOR Reese: Were married men just desperately attractive to her? Or was the pool of men who were available to her as a trans woman only those who had already locked down a cis wife and could now “explore” with her? The easy answer, the one that all her girls advocated, was to call men dogs. But now, here’s Reese—sneaking around with *another* handsome, charming, motherfucking cheater. Look at her, wearing a black lace dress and sitting in his parked Beamer, waiting while he goes into a Duane Reade to buy condoms. Then she’s going to let him come over to her apartment, avoid the pointed glare of her roommate, Iris, and have him fuck her right on the trite floral bedspread that the *last* married dude bought her so that her room would seem a little more girly and naughty when he snuck away from his wife.

Reese had already diagnosed her own problem. She didn’t know how to be alone. She fled from her own company, from her own solitude. Along with telling her how awful her cheating men were, her friends also told her that after two major breakups, she needed time to learn to be herself, by herself. But she couldn’t be alone in any kind of moderate way. Give her a week to herself and she began to isolate, cultivating an ash pile of loneliness that built on itself exponentially, until she was daydreaming about selling everything and drifting away on a boat toward nowhere. To jolt herself back to life, she went on Grindr, or Tinder, or whatever—and administered ten thousand volts to the heart by chasing the most dramatic tachycardia of an affair she could find. Married men were the best for fleeing loneliness, because married men also didn’t know how to be alone. Married men were experts at being together, at not letting go, no matter what, until death do us part. With the pretense of setting the boundaries of “just an affair,” Reese would swan dive super deep, super hard. By telling herself it would just be a fling, she gave herself permission to fulfill every fetish the guy had ever dreamed of, to unearth his every secret hurt, to debase herself in the most lush, vicious, and unsustainable ways—then collapse into resentment, sadness, and spite that it had been just a fling, because hadn’t she been brave enough and vulnerable enough to dive super deep, super hard?

She saw herself as attractive, round face and full figure, but she didn't pretend that she stopped traffic; nor did she frequently note people standing around to admire the harvests of her brain. But with the right kind of man, she bore a genius for drama. She could distill it and flame it like jet fuel when solitude chilled her bones.

Her man this time was similar to her others. A handsome, married alpha-type who put her on a leash in the bedroom. Only this one was better, because he was an HIV-positive cowboy-turned-lawyer. He had a thing for trans girls and had seroconverted while cheating on his wife with a trans woman, *and* the wife had stayed with him, *and* now he was at it again with Reese. *Wheeeee!*

"Did you bottom or something?" Reese had asked on their first date.

"Fuck no," he said. "My doctors said I had a one in ten thousand chance to contract it from getting head. You figure that at least ten thousand blow jobs are happening every minute, but that one in ten thousand was me. Also, she gave me a lot of blow jobs."

"Cool," said Reese, who knew that that explanation wasn't factual, but had only really agreed to make sure he wasn't going to try to bottom with her. Within the hour, she had him back in her room and confessing from whom he'd gotten HIV and where. Within two hours, Reese convinced him to talk about his wife's disappointment, how she was unwilling to let him fuck a child into her even though his HIV had declined to undetectable levels. He described how much his wife hated the IVF treatments, how their clinical nature reminded her over and over what he had done to put her on a cold doctor's table instead of in their warm marital bed.

"You're getting a lot more candor out of me than I'm used to," her cowboy said, sounding surprised at himself, even as he squeezed Reese's tits. "The power of pussy, I guess."

"You might get my pussy," she responded, enjoying herself and aping his cowboy drawl, "but a good woman'll flay your soul."

"Ain't that the truth," he drawled back. He lifted a big paw to the back of her neck and brought her face close to his. She sighed, went limp.

Her eyes glassily held his.

"Tell you what," he told her, "first I'm going to own your pussy..."

He paused, and with his hand still on her neck, he slowly, firmly, pushed her face down into a pillow. “Then we’ll see about my soul.”

—

Now he slides back into the car, with a little brown bag full of lube and condoms, and a tickling of anticipation slides across Reese’s stomach. “Do we really need these tonight?” he asks her, holding up the bag. “You know I’m gonna want to knock you up.”

This was why she still put up with him: He got it. With him, she’d discovered sex that was really and truly dangerous. Cis women, she supposed, rubbed against a frisson of danger every time they had sex. The risk, the thrill, that they might get pregnant—a single fuck to fuck up (or bless?) their lives. For cis women, Reese imagined, sex was a game played at the precipice of a cliff. But until her cowboy, she hadn’t ever had the pleasure of that particular danger. Only now, with his HIV, had she found an analogue to a cis woman’s life changer. Her cowboy could fuck her and mark her forever. He could fuck her and end her. His cock could obliterate her.

His viral load was undetectable, he said, but she never asked to see any papers. That would kill the sweetness and danger of it. He liked to play close to the edge too, pushing to knock her up, to impregnate her with a viral seed. Make her the mommy, her body host to new life, part of her but not, just as mothers eternal.

“We agreed on condoms always. You said you didn’t want it on your conscience,” she said.

“Yeah, but that was before you started on your birth control.”

She first called her PrEP “birth control” at a Chinese place in Sunset Park where he felt safe that none of his wife’s friends would possibly run into him. It popped into her head as a joke, but he looked at her and said, “Fuck, I just got so hard.” He signaled for the check, told her that she wouldn’t get to see a movie that night, and drove her right home to put her facedown on her floral bedspread. In the morning, she sexted him one of the sexiest, but most ostensibly non-sexual, sexts of her life—a short video of her cramming a couple of her big blue Truvada pills into one of those distinctive pastel birth control day-of-the-month clamshell cases.

From then on, her “birth control pills” were part of their sex life.

There was another reason, beyond the stigma, taboo, and eroticization, that their particular brand of bugchasing had bite for Reese: She really did want to be a mom. She wanted it worse than anything. She had spent her whole adulthood with the queers, ingesting their radical relationships and polyamory and gender roles, but somehow, she still never displaced from the pinnacle of womanhood those nice white Wisconsin moms who had populated her childhood. She never lost that secret fervor to grow up into one of them. In motherhood she could imagine herself apart from her loneliness and neediness, because as a mother, she believed, you were never truly alone. No matter that her own and her trans friends’ actual experiences of unconditional parental love always turned out to be awfully conditional.

Perhaps equally important, as a mother, she saw herself finally granted the womanhood that she suspected the goddesses of her childhood took as their natural due. She’d set herself up for it, once. She’d been in a lesbian relationship with a trans woman named Amy—a woman with a good job in tech, and who became so suburban-presentable that when she spoke, you imagined her words in Martha Stewart’s signature typeface. With Amy, Reese had gotten as close to domesticity as she figured possible for a trans girl—the trust and boredom and stability that now had the faded aspect of a dream recalled right after you wake. They even had an apartment by Prospect Park—the kind of bright, airy space that evinced enough good taste and stalwart respectability that the idea of showing adoption agencies where they lived had been one of the lesser obstacles to motherhood.

But now, three years later, as Reese’s odometer clicked up into her midthirties, she began to think about what she called the *Sex and the City* Problem.

The *Sex and the City* Problem wasn’t just Reese’s problem, it was a problem for all women. But unlike millions of cis women before Reese, no generation of trans women had ever solved it. The problem could be described thusly: When a woman begins to notice herself aging, the prospect of making some meaning out of her life grows more and more urgent. A need to save herself, or be saved, as the joys of beauty and youth repeat themselves to lesser and lesser

effect. But in finding meaning, Reese would argue—despite the changes wrought by feminism—women still found themselves with only four major options to save themselves, options represented by the story arcs of the four female characters of *Sex and the City*. Find a partner, and be a Charlotte. Have a career, and be a Samantha. Have a baby, and be a Miranda. Or finally, express oneself in art or writing, and be a Carrie. Every generation of women reinvented this formula over and over, Reese believed, blending it and twisting it, but never quite escaping it.

Yet, for every generation of trans women prior to Reese's, the *Sex and the City* Problem was an aspirational problem. Only the rarest, most stealth, most successful of trans women ever had the chance to even confront it. The rest were barred from all four options at the outset. No jobs, no lovers, no babies, and while a trans woman might have been a muse, no one wanted art in which she spoke for herself. And so, trans women defaulted into a kind of No Futurism, and while certain other queers might celebrate the irony, joy, and graves into which queers often rush, that rush into No Future looked a lot more glamorous when the beautiful corpse left behind was a wild and willful choice rather than a statistical probability.

When Reese lived with Amy, she aspired to the *Sex and the City* Problem herself. It felt radical for her, as a trans woman, to luxuriate in the contemplation of how bourgeois to become. It felt like a success not to have that choice made for her. Then Amy detransitioned and it all fell apart.

Now futurelessness had crept back into view. Now Reese made other women's prizes her own bliss, and made babies out of viruses.

"All right," she says, after they'd been driving for about ten minutes.

"All right, what?"

"All right. Let's see if you can get me pregnant."

"Really?"

"Yeah." Her cowboy starts to say something, but she cuts him off. "Only, if we're going to do this, you've got to start treating me better. You've got to treat me like the mother of your child."

He reaches over to pinch her side. "Mother of my child? C'mon. You don't want that. If I put a tadpole in the well, then you're gonna

want to be the knocked-up sixteen-year-old from the bad side of town. You want everyone knowing it's 'cause you're an easy slut."

She squirms away from his pinch. "I'm serious. Treat me better."

He frowns, but keeps his eyes on the road. "Yeah. Okay. I will. Let's get some food," he says, braking at a red light.

"Really?" They were driving to her neighborhood, Greenpoint, and he often wouldn't eat with her in that area. He knew too many people who lived there. Once she forced him to go out to a vegan buffet by her house, and he barely made eye contact the whole time. His gaze instead jerked to the door whenever someone new came into the place. After that, she let him drive her south, or sometimes into Queens. Never Manhattan, never Williamsburg, where his wife made her social life.

But now, she says he can fuck her without a condom and all his rules go out the window. Reese has a moment of satisfaction. Her body is the ultimate trump card.

"Yeah," he says, "maybe you could run in somewhere and pick up some takeout."

Of course. Takeout. With him waiting in the car. She nods. "Sure, what would you like?"

—

In the Thai restaurant, she doesn't order anything for herself. He loves curries, spiced to a barely edible Scoville level. She does not. She'll make herself something at home after he leaves. She's scrolling through Instagram when her phone rings, and it's a number she doesn't recognize, some out-of-state area code. Her cowboy uses Google Voice so her texts don't show up on his iPad at home, which his wife sometimes borrows, and Google often routes the calls through weird numbers.

She hits the green Answer button and brings the phone to her ear. "I got you green curry with beef, five-star spiciness," she says by way of a greeting.

"Hey, that's nice of you, but if you remember, I was always such a wuss about spice." A man's voice. Warm and smooth, but none of her cowboy's drawl, which he somehow managed to keep, even

through his years in New York.

She lowers the phone, checks the number. “Who is this?”

The man’s tone changes, not quite apologetic, but inviting. “Reese. Hi. Sorry, it’s Ames.”

Out in the car she can see her cowboy, the glow of his own phone illuminating the glasses he only wore to read. She turns away, as if he might overhear her through the glass windows of his car, the plate glass of the restaurant, over the clang of the kitchen and the talk of the scattered customers.

“Why are you calling, Ames? I didn’t think we were speaking anymore.”

“I know.”

She waits, holds her lips together. She can hear him breathing. She wants to make him talk first.

“I’m not calling to bother you,” he presses on. “I was hoping for your help.”

“My help? I didn’t know I had anything left for you to take.”

He pauses. “Take from you?” His bafflement sounds genuine. This was his whole problem. That he couldn’t see what he had led her to lose. “Maybe I deserve that. But I promise I’m not calling for that. It’s almost the opposite.”

“I’m on a date. I’ve got some Thai food coming.” She knows it’s vindictive to say. But she can’t help it. He’s thrown her off, and she wants both to return the favor and to prove to him that her life has moved on.

“I can call at a different time?”

“No, you’ve got until my food gets here to explain yourself.”

“Is there some guy watching us talk?”

“I’m getting takeout. He’s waiting in the car.” A thrum of satisfaction plays in Reese’s chest. Clearly, however Ames had anticipated this conversation going, she has wrested it away from him.

“Okay,” he says, “I’d hoped to explain this at length, but we’ll do it your way. Remember how you always wanted us to have a baby together? That’s what we had planned for?”

Something must be off with him that he’d call her about this. He

wasn't the type to hurt people for fun, and he must know such a question, asked so directly, would hurt her. She feels stupid for having told him that she was on a date.

"Is that still something you'd want? A baby, I mean?" His question ends on an up note, as though he's slightly afraid of his audacity in having voiced it.

"Of course I still fucking want a baby," she snaps.

"That's so good to hear, Reese," he says. His tone is relieved. She knows him so well, she can almost picture the way his body is relaxing. "Because something happened. Even after everything, you're the person I trust most to talk to me about it. For everything we had, please, please, can I see you? I badly need to talk to you."

"You'll have to tell me more than just this, Ames."

He exhales. "All right. I got a woman pregnant. I'm going to have a baby."

Reese can't believe it. She can't believe that Ames would call her to tell her that he had gotten the thing she so desperately wanted. She closes her eyes, counts to five.

The waitress behind the counter plops down a brown bag, and signals that it's her order. But Reese doesn't notice. Her cowboy, his five-star green curry, the birth control pill he'll feed her later—they're all lost to her. Somewhere, somehow, Amy did the impossible: She got herself a baby.

—

Katrina sits in the roller chair before Ames's desk. The moment has an air of uncommon inversion. Because she is his boss, Ames nearly always goes to her office and sits in front of her desk. Her office, corresponding to their relative places in the corporate hierarchy, is double the square footage of his, with two full windows looking out on two neighboring buildings, and between them, a sliver of East River view. By contrast, Ames's office has one window overlooking a small parking lot. Once, in the twilight, he saw a brown creature trotting spritely across the pavement—and has since maintained that it was an urban coyote. One takes one's excitements where one may.

Katrina rifles through a briefcase, pulls out a manila folder, and plops it on his desk. Her coming to his office makes him tense, like a teenager whose parents have entered his room.

“Well,” she says. “It’s real. This is happening.” He reaches for the folder. He has good posture, and gives her an easy smile. The folder opens to reveal printouts from an online patient portal.

“My gyno,” Katrina says, watching him closely. “She followed up with a blood test and a pelvic exam. She confirmed the home test results. Without an ultrasound, she can’t say how far I am, so I had one scheduled for the Thursday after next. I mean, I know you maybe aren’t sure yet how you feel about it, but maybe if you come, that’ll help? If I’m more than four weeks into it, we’ll be able to see the baby—or I guess, embryo?”

He is aware that she is scrutinizing him for a reaction. He had been unable to give one after the pregnancy test came back positive. He feels the same numbness that he felt then, only now, he can no longer delay by telling her that he wants to wait for official confirmation to get his emotions involved. “Amazing,” he says, and tries out a smile that he fears might be coming off as a grimace. “I guess it’s real! Especially since we have”—he searches briefly for a phrase, and then comes up with one—“an entire dossier of evidence.”

Katrina shifts to cross her legs. She’s wearing casual wedge heels. He always notices her clothing, half out of admiration, and half out of the habit of noting what’s going on in the field of women’s fashion. “Your reaction has been hard to read,” she says carefully. “I don’t know, I thought maybe if you saw it in black and white, I’d be able to gauge how you were actually feeling.” She pauses and swallows. “But I still can’t.” He sees the effort it costs her to muster this level of assertion.

He stands up, walks around the desk, and half sits against it, just in front of her, so his leg is touching hers.

He rotates the printouts, there’s a list of test results, but he can’t make sense of them. His brain shorts out when he cross-references the data that they clearly show—he is a father-to-be—with the data he stores in his heart: He should not be a father.

Three years have passed since Ames stopped taking estrogen. He injected his last dose on Reese's thirty-second birthday. Reese, his ex, still lives in New York. They haven't spoken in two years, although he sent her a birthday card last year. He received no response. Throughout their relationship, she had always talked assuredly about how she'd have a kid by age thirty-five. As far as he knows, that hasn't happened.

It is only now, three years after their breakup, that Ames is able to talk about Reese casually, calling her "my ex" and moving the conversation along without dwelling. Because in truth, he still misses her in a way that talking about her, thinking about her, remains dangerous to indulge in—as an alcoholic can't think too much about how much she'd really like just one drink. When Ames thinks hard about Reese, he feels abandoned and grows angry, morose, and worst of all, ashamed. Because he has trouble explaining exactly what he still wants from her. For a while he thought it was romance, but his desire has lost any kind of sexual edge. Instead, he misses her in a familial way, in the way he missed and felt betrayed by his birth family when they cut off contact in the early years of his transition. His sense of abandonment plucked at a nerve deeper, more adolescent than that of jilted adult romantic love. Reese hadn't just been his lover, she'd been something like his mother. She had taught him to be a woman...or he'd learned to be a woman with her. She had found him in a plastic state of early development, a second puberty, and she'd molded him to her tastes. And now she was gone, but the imprint of her hands remained, so that he could never forget her.

He hadn't understood how little sense he made as a person without Reese until after she began to detach from him, until the lack of her became so painful that he started to once again want the armor of masculinity and, somewhat haphazardly, detransitioned to fully suit up in it.

So now, three years have passed living once again in a testosterone-dependent body. Yet even without the shots or pills, Ames had believed that he'd been on androgen-blockers long enough to have atrophied his testicles into permanent sterility.

That's what he told Katrina when they hooked up the first time, the night of the agency's annual Easter Keg Hunt. He told her that he was sterile—not that he'd been a transsexual woman with atrophied balls.

—

Ames sifts through the papers in the manila folder Katrina has brought. Beneath the printouts from her doctor are more printouts, from what look like Reddit forums. “What are these?”

She drops her hand to her stomach. It's flat, no baby bump, but she's already holding herself like a pregnant woman. “Well, I know you said you were sterile now. I was looking it up, and vasectomies are like ninety-nine percent effective, but I found some message boards, from men who still got women pregnant—”

He raises a hand. “Wait a sec. I never said I had a vasectomy.”

His office, like all the offices in this row, has only a glass wall to separate it from the hallway. He's at the end of the row, beside an alcove into which is tucked the copy machine, water cooler, coffee maker, and a little kitchenette stocked with—due to a recent human resources campaign—only healthy organic snacks. Coworker hallway traffic remains constant throughout the day. He would not consider his office to be an ideal location to come out as a former transsexual.

“No? But we haven't used condoms for months and this whole time I thought—what did you mean, then? Like low sperm count?”

“I had very low testosterone for a while.” He works to keep his voice casual, to resist the urge to lower it nervously. “And during that time, my testicles atrophied, and my doctor told me that none of my sperm would ever again be viable.”

When Ames first went in for an estrogen prescription, he saw a gentle, elderly endocrinologist, who had taken on trans patients not because of any special interest in gender, but because trans patients were, in his words, “so happy to come see me for treatment.” The bulk of the doctor's other patients suffered from hormonal disorders that made them emotionally volatile. After this endo discovered trans gratitude, he filled his appointments with as many

transsexuals as he could find.

Ames, who had no history with trans therapy, and none of the paperwork that the hormone gatekeepers tended to require, had spent weeks before the appointment fretting that the endo would declare him “not really trans” and deny him hormones. Upon hearing that the doctor appreciated appreciation, Ames therefore gushed with gratitude, and duly walked out with a prescription for injectable estrogen. At his next appointment, the endo confided, “Perhaps, last time, I prescribed somewhat hastily. I should have said more about sterility.” He told Ames that permanent sterility would set in within the first six months of a hormone replacement therapy regimen, and he gave Ames a recommendation for a sperm bank.

The next day, Ames mustered great bravery and called the sperm bank. He did not want to think about fatherhood, that final plume in the cap of manhood, but he forced himself to call anyway. A receptionist on the other end of the line quoted annual prices for sperm storage akin to his cable subscription, which he supposed was a reasonable cost for preserving the viability of his future genetic line. The receptionist put him on hold to make an appointment and as Vivaldi played, Ames pondered whether he ought to cancel his subscription to HBO in order to afford this sperm bank. He couldn't fully comprehend the enormous weight of fatherhood and generational lineage, but he could easily comprehend how much he did not want to cancel HBO.

Without further consideration, he hung up. By the time his nipples began to ache that spring, he figured it was too late anyhow. The more his nipples hurt, the less he suffocated from the dread that came from thoughts of fatherhood. Now, with Katrina sitting in his office, for the first time in a long time, he had to think about the possibility of having sired a child. Shortly, very shortly, he was going to be called upon to make some decision, which would lead to other decisions, generations of decisions generated by this decision.

“Your testicles atrophied?” Katrina asks, baffled. “But they felt normal to me!”

“Yes,” he agrees. “I mean, they're not huge or anything.”

“No, not huge,” Katrina affirms, and then adds encouragingly,

“but fine!”

On the other side of his office’s glass wall, Karen from the art department pauses in the hallway to unwrap a granola bar. Ames becomes suddenly aware that Katrina and he are casually discussing his balls in the middle of a workday.

Coworkers had shared the office gossip about Katrina almost immediately after Ames had joined the agency: bad divorce. She’d left her husband a few months before he’d interviewed. She cried in her office, the coworkers told him, then told her secretary not to put her husband’s calls through. He had cheated on her, said one. No, no, she’d had a miscarriage. Incorrect, said another, they’d had money problems. The speculation took on a tone both lurid and compulsory—to have a boss is so commonplace that one rarely remarks on its strangeness, yet its structure compels a cult of personality around even the most quotidian of managers. As an underling, one needs to furnish an epistemology of how it came to pass that she has sway over one’s precious autonomy. Basic comprehension of capitalism’s arbitrary mechanics doesn’t satisfy—the heart demands a human explanation. Or at least that’s what Ames said to justify his initial crush.

Still, over that first year that Ames worked for Katrina, she kept her personal life just that. Instead of talking about her divorce, Ames intuited it. He noted the slight woundedness and exasperation that clung to her, the nearly teenage angst and willingness to test bad ideas that led to a certain oh-fuck-it-ness about her work and a straightforward honesty with her employees.

She developed a visceral suspicion of conventional narratives. The anodyne corporate clients who came to the agency occasionally saw one or two much darker and more experimental pitches for their online marketing campaigns slipped in among the conventional fare. Dadaism for the Clorox bleach campaign. Cyborgian despair for Anker batteries. A series of radio ads for Purina in which Jon Lovitz catered to nineties nostalgia by reprising his cult role as critic Jay Sherman in order to give negative reviews to various puppies. It made her good at her work. Ames interpreted her tendency to re-narrativize as divorce-induced.

Well into their romance, after they’d already slept together

numerous times, she brought up the subject of her divorce. They were in his bed, on their sides, facing each other, he propped up on an elbow, she with her face resting on one of his forest-green pillowcases, her glossy brown hair stepping down from head to pillow to bed. The bedside light shining behind her illuminated the outer crescents of her face—he still instinctively noticed the curve of a brow.

“I know that people in the office probably told you about the miscarriage,” she said. “I stupidly talked about it with a few people. Telling Abby anything is a mistake.” He laughed, because, yeah, Abby was a gossip.

“When you get a divorce,” she said after a moment, “everyone expects you to provide a story to justify it. Every woman I’ve ever met who has had a divorce has a story to explain herself. But in real life the story and actual reasons for the divorce diverge. In reality, everything is more ambivalent. My own reasons are closer to a tone than a series of causes and effects. But when I talk about it, I know people want a cause and effect, a clear *why*.”

“All right,” Ames said. “So what’s the tone of your divorce?”

“I like to call it the Ennui of Heterosexuality.”

“I see. Do you still suffer from the ennui of heterosexuality?” Ames asked, gesturing grandly at their postcoital bedroom tableau.

“I suffered from a miscarriage,” she replied defiantly, puncturing his irony.

Ames quickly apologized.

Katrina shifted a pillow, and when she turned back to Ames, her face was...amused? “See, you proved my point. When I said ‘ennui of heterosexuality,’ you challenged me, but when I said ‘miscarriage,’ you immediately apologized. That’s why the miscarriage is the official story of my divorce. No one ever challenges it. Miscarriages are private, and so my miscarriage is a clean get-out-free card. It makes for a divorce in which Danny was blameless—grief where you lose something you can’t quite name. People assume that mourning drove a sad wedge between a couple—no one’s fault. Everything is assumed. No one ever asks how I actually felt about the miscarriage.”

“How did you feel about the miscarriage?” Ames asked.

“I felt relief.”

“Relief?”

“Yes. I was relieved. Which made me feel like a psychopath. I read all these articles in women’s magazines about miscarriages, and they all said that I would feel grief and guilt. They assured me that it wasn’t my fault: that it wasn’t because of that glass of wine I had once, or that Italian sub full of processed meat. But I never thought it was my fault. My own guilt came from not having guilt. After a while of feeling that way, I began to ask why. Why should I feel relieved? It caused me to look harder at my marriage. I was relieved because of something I didn’t want to admit: I didn’t want to be with Danny anymore and if we had a kid together I would have to be. Danny was a good boyfriend to have when I was younger, when we were in college. Like, in the same way that a Saint Bernard would be a good dog to have if you were lost in the mountains. A big amiable body that a girl could shelter behind. Danny was an idea I inherited, maybe from growing up in Vermont, of what a man was supposed to be. We looked good together; like, early on I knew any photo for our wedding announcement was going to look like it came from a magazine. So when he proposed, I accepted, even though we had been dating two years, and I don’t think that sex ever lasted longer than fifteen minutes, including foreplay, and despite the fact that by the three-month point in our relationship, I had somehow already ended up doing his laundry.

“One time, I made this joke that my marriage was like a push-up bra: It looked pretty good underneath a shirt, but you know it’s all just padding and by the end of the day you can’t wait to take the damn thing off. My friends laughed, but I felt icy, because I realized I had inadvertently told the truth and it was awful.”

Ames listened. She had once told him that she liked how he didn’t seem to feel a need to speak or give advice when she was working through a thought out loud.

Katrina removed her earrings and set them on the nightstand. “Danny and I went to Dartmouth with this couple—Pete and Lia. When they moved to New York from Seattle, they did this thing where they invited other married couples over to watch *Cheers* and eat pie. The couples were the kind of people who liked rock climbing