

Content Warning: Story discusses miscarriage/pregnancy loss

We don't think differently about John getting fired yesterday. "It's a good thing," we say. Because it is. It will give us more time to do some of the things we want to do before we have the baby. John waits for Jane to correct him, to say before *she* has the baby. She is the one having it. One could barely describe what he did as helping, she'd say. But she doesn't say it today. We just nod in agreement because John's firing will give us time to do the things we want. "Like going to Paris," we suggest. "Oh, or skydiving," we continue. Although, we might not be able to skydive pregnant.

Well, he can skydive.

We laugh. We feel the same, good thing about John's firing, but then his phone rings with that familiar ringtone, the only customized ringtone for his contacts, his mother. "Why does she keep calling you?" we ask. "She's looking at jobs for me," we reply. It hasn't even been two days, and

she needs to stay out of it, Jane says,

but we quickly shut down that conversation. John's mother is divisive because she cared—

because she feels Jane needs to take care of John and is doing a bang-up job of it

—because she cares about them, us, but she isn't part of our relationship, no, no, right, John? "I love my mom," we say.

But more than me? Jane says. You wonder, "does it have to be a competition," and she says wrong answer, but

We cut it off again there because it only could get worse if we follow that thread, so we instead ask: have you been looking? For jobs, I mean. We want to go to Paris, but it might be easier to go if we know we have enough money. And John asks, “have you been looking?” as a counter, and Jane wonders, for myself or you, and when he doesn’t respond for a moment,

I can feel the fire starting in my chest and rising like curdling vomit to my face.

What does he think? Does he really think she’s looking? And John said, “for me” and

we soothe, of course I have. We both don’t want Jane to work, after all. We talked about it in length before trying for the baby. “The second you are pregnant, you should quit,” we had said.

Should I work until the birth? she had asked.

“No,” we said. “You can prepare for it this way.” So the test came back positive, and Jane came out of her office with a box and no tears we could see. “I miss it sometimes,” we said. “You working and all.” I miss it sometimes, we said, and John said, “But not more than I’d miss the baby.” We don’t think differently about John’s firing or Jane’s quitting. We don’t think differently about his mom or going to Paris. But he might think differently if

I told him I had a reason to get my job back. John wasn’t there when the blood came quickly and painfully and clotting. John wasn’t there when Jane, all the fear of what she’d researched resurfacing, rushed to my gynecologist. You weren’t there when I couldn’t see it anymore. You weren’t there. You weren’t there. You

would probably think the same, though. We would probably try again. That’s what he will say, and she will be okay with that. She just needs to tell him first. It had been a few days since she’d gone to the gynecologist, a few days’ worth of processing, of healing,

a few days of nodding through conversations, of attempting to put off purchases, of throwing herself into their relationship by visiting him for lunch and ironing his entire closet because she couldn't handle it on her own, but telling him was its own form of torture because he was so excited, so excited, and she didn't know what would happen if he knew, and they had things to talk about when they went to bed now, but now he was fired, now they were going to struggle because he had no job, and she could work, she could work, because she was empty now; she wasn't a home anymore, so she didn't have to be at home anymore, and he was looking at her gently, carefully, and I need to tell him, I need to tell him now before it's too late. I, no,

we just need to tell you something. "What's that?" we ask. "What is it?" This is hard to say, Jane says. And John can see her shaking, trembling, the bird he picked up from careless destruction when they first met. Fragile, fragile, smile for his mouth with shushes escaping in careful deliberation, fragile, fragile, and he had healed her from her last relationship, he knows he did, and we are grateful, grateful, and she's fragile, fragile again, and he's smiling, shushing again, and he can't wait for the baby, can't wait for the baby to be fragile in his arms too, to be the protector of an addition to us. Shush, shush, Jane, and drops like beaded decoration drip from our face, and John lets his thumb wipe them away,

wipe them off of you, his face to touch, his face to remedy, his face to—

Jane swallows. We breathe. I have to tell you about the baby, Jane gets out, and John visibly winces because he can see the plea in

my face, in

our face, for him to not be mad—please don't be mad at her—and we can't speak, neither of them can speak, because John knows Jane so well, and they are one, and if she is empty, he

has been made empty too. Finally, after brushing our face with his hand for a long time, he is able to say, “Can you tell me?” And

she shakes her head because she can't tell him, because even if she hadn't wanted to quit, and even if I hadn't wanted the baby—I HADN'T WANTED THE BABY—she did now, she did now that it had been in her, and it had been her, and she had screamed when she had seen it leave, and she can still hear that scream and feel the weight of nothing, of nothing, of absolute emptiness that he would never, ever feel no matter how much he thought the baby was theirs, no matter how much he thought he was part of this, no matter how much he thought it was okay that he was suffocating her own life with his arms around her right now, no matter how much he didn't know her because he still didn't understand the way he was squeezing, squeezing her was instead ridding her soul from her body, and it isn't allowing me to breathe, so instead

we breathe. He repeats, “Can you tell me,” and we say, as best as we can because that's it now—just the best we can do is it—I'm sorry. And with that, we know.

Jane feels John withdraw from her slightly. His arms aren't wrapped as tightly anymore. His face isn't as close to hers, his thumbs not brushing tears off of my face. She shivers with flickers of *he doesn't care anymore* because she knows how badly he had wanted the baby, and she remembers how he had asked, how he had proposed it like a solution when everyone knew it wasn't a solution, but maybe it would be for them, maybe it could stop them from their quiet arguments, not loud enough to come to conclusions, not absent enough to be harmless, but oh god, she knew what they say about not having a baby to save a marriage, but when he suggested it and she knew their ship was already sunk, how could I have said no, no, how could I have shook my head and argued because he

should just want to be with me, he should just want to be with the family we already had, wasn't the two of us a family, but it wasn't enough for him, and I was never enough for him, and I had never been enough for anyone.

We breathe. Our face is hard to read, but he gets closer to her because in actuality, he must still care, and as we keep breathing, it hurts to stay alive. "I'm sorry," he says this time, and

Jane's body tenses under his loose grip. Some relief, though. She doesn't know if he's sorry for me or if he's sorry we aren't complete. But there's some relief.

"I love you," we say, and it doesn't matter who says it because they're both thinking it. There isn't much else to think. Until he says, "Will you ever want to try again?"

He might not know, but with the words, they are fragmented. He still holds her. But she wonders what his arms are feeling. Not her body. Maybe he is touching what he deems possibility. She had just been hope before, the someone one had been in love with the idea of until another someone fit that dream more closely. Did John feel the same? Did he love her for what she could be? And she knew this would happen. She knew he would want to try again. But him saying it now...they are fragmented. But she says, yes, and then, I suppose.

"Do you want to?" John asks.

I might want to go back to work, she thinks. But now that she knows what she doesn't have, how could she ever feel fulfilled, how could she ever want anything for herself, how could John ever ask that she try again? And the way he's looking at her—what does he actually see? Her, or a newly impregnated stomach? But she does love him. Right? Right. She does think she loves him. Right. Is that enough? Yes. Right. Is that enough?

She says I don't know.

How could she, after all?

He can't tell what she's thinking, but she thinks it for a long time until there is some form of resolve in her face. They've always wanted the same thing, after all. He verbalizes it. "I think we should try again," John says. And it's quiet.

Finally, "I think I am done trying," Jane says. And it's quiet.