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Prepartum Depression

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Prepartum Depression

She confidently comes out of the bathroom holding a small, slender, white piece of plastic. "I'm pregnant."

I see her bent over the toilet after breakfast, coffee and huevos rancheros in reverse. She flicks a piece of bell pepper from the rim that hasn't quite made it. She doesn't look so sexy with dribble on her chin. She tells me I have to get rid of my cologne. My ear used to get licked and nibbled because my musk was so appealing. Now bacon dipped in peanut butter turns her on. Her boobs ache, and not for my gentle touch. She's too tired to do anything, especially that, except at the most random times, like the butcher shop. I want your pork loin, she says. I do not feel like sharing my schnitzel.

I see her hand nervously squeezing mine during the ultrasound. I do my best to look brave. I feign pride when the nurse gives us the sonogram, a three by five colorless, impending blur. I make some remark about my scion, the future varsity athlete astrophysicist. She wants to have it framed. Why do I need it framed when it's encysted in my mind? The doctor tells us everything is normal. I see a bump. No more black cocktail dress. No more cocktails. Happy hour used to be our thing. I down my neat scotches alone after work to delay going home.

I see my office disappear. My desk is swapped for a crib, my reading chair for a rocking chair. My bookshelf collects dust in storage, my volumes fodder for vermin. I have to pay the bills and look at porn at the kitchen counter. I have to paint the nursery yellow. All my knickknacks are gone, too. Everything angular must go. Baby-proof – taste poof. Her hormones are out of control, and I can't get a word in edgewise to slow Pregzilla's redecorating rampage.

I see her dragging me to Babies'R'Us. She is gaga for everything, holding up the baby shoes, onesies, and bibs with androgynous icons – teddy bears and balloons. I want to know where the Mens'R'Us store is. I do – it's called Tassels and it's on 6th. She zaps everything with the registry gun. I like the idea of a shower. People buy us stuff we need, plus I have permission to disappear for the day. She and her friends ooh and aah over NASA-engineered strollers while I'm at the OTB. I see a frantic phone call. I rush to the hospital in my new dad-mobile. The maternity ward smells like diaper and despair. She looks awful. There's crying and placenta everywhere. Why the

hell would I want to cut the umbilical cord? A little girl grips my pinky. I'm scared. I see waking up in the middle of the night to tell my daughter to stop waking up in the middle of the night. I cradle her softly as I look around the room she usurped. She spits up on me. I dip the tip of her bottle in rum, the only fatherly advice my dad offered on child rearing. I need sleep. I don't eat lunch at work anymore. I go to an empty conference room and conk out. One of the firm's partners catches me. He laughs, says he's been there. I don't want to be here.

I see Christmas. Her mother tells her Santa is coming. I have to HO HO HO shortly after midnight so she can run down the stairs to find all her presents under the tree and her stocking stuffed. She loves all her toys. I get a World's Greatest Dad coffee mug. How 'bout rent?

I see a nursery school drawing on the refrigerator under a #1 Dad magnet. I cringe every time I reach for a beer. It's our Crayola family photo. She couldn't manage to stay within the lines, but she made sure to accurately capture my recently gained girth. Nice attention to detail, honey.

I see school plays, a parochial rendition of A Christmas Carol. I'm supposed to be proud she's a beggar, the scourge of Scrooge. All the other dads record everything. I nip on my flask while the tiny thespians adorably forget their lines. A mother notices and disapprovingly shakes her head. You don't really care either, lady. My daughter crouching in that cardboard box is a better actress than you. The recitals and softball games are no better. Don't worry honey, you'll get 'em next time. She doesn't. She strikes out. It's tee ball.

I see a boyfriend, a pimply punk with unruly limbs, sitting in my den waiting to take my daughter to a party. He's older. He can drive. My chauffeur days are over. I'm supposed to vet and hassle this horny toad, assure him of certain disembowelment should he attempt to uproot my daughter's flower, but the game is on and it's the fourth quarter. She kisses me on the cheek before heading out to kiss him not on the cheek. I don't give her a curfew. I don't care when she comes home as long as it's sans zygote. I see her prom. She wears an expensive dress and fills it out. Those same dads are still there with their camcorders. Some of my daughter's friends are foxy. I envy the young guys. No taxes, no jobs, no kids, no responsibilities – just man time. Me time. I barely remember smoking at the pier or hoops at the Y or hitting the slots in AC.

I see her graduate from college. I am happy. I no longer have to claim her as a dependent. She moves out. The nest is empty. I have time but no daughter to fill it with. I see walking her down the aisle. She is crying. I smile gladly as I give her away. It's your turn to dry those eyes, buddy.

I see her children. I have to babysit them while she goes to work. AARP never mentioned this. Where is shuffleboard, dinner at four, movies before noon? Where are my golden years? What happened to my life?

"Are you sure?"

She hands me the missile. A small purple plus sign stares back at me. It's positive.

About Matt Doran

Matt Doran is a MFA fiction student at San Diego State graduating in May of 2012 and resigned to accepting a job as a plumber, fluffer or both. He also rows, makes a mean figgy pudding, flaunts his New York roots proudly and leaps tall shrubs in a single bound.