

**PREGNANT**

**IT'S SUCH A  
STRANGE WORD**

**Rosanna Wood**

Part of

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**Kaleidoscope Health & Care**

**Cannon Wharf, Pell Street**

**London SE8 5EN**

**hello@kaleidoscope.healthcare**

**www.kaleidoscope.healthcare**

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**The future is...  
logical and  
nothing is  
random,  
not even  
conception**

## **2118 A.D.**

I'm afraid I won't love my baby. I haven't told anybody, not even Carter. Not that he would understand. I'm not so sure he and I are the great Match we are supposed to be. But I won't admit to that either. To divulge these secrets would be madness. Sometimes, I lie awake at night scared I'm going to mumble something in my sleep that will give the game away and wake up to be informed that the baby is gone.

I really want this baby. We both do, of course. They take that into account when assessing you. I think I must really, *really* want the baby more than I realised because when I took the Yearning section of the Parenting Tests, the screen lit up in bright colours like fireworks in the sky on New Year's Eve.

I could be reading too much into it. Perhaps I'm trying to reassure myself I'm a good candidate for motherhood. Perhaps I'm trying to soothe the voice at the back of my head that whispers during the darkest part of the night 'What if? What if?'. That voice that makes me worry I won't love her.

It's a her. *She's* a her. The baby. A girl with his curly hair and my small nose. She has his scientific skills and mine for words. Neither of us are particularly good at sports so she doesn't have that gene but she will have his metabolism which will be a blessing during puberty.

Before we were informed we could become parents, we were asked to pick out the genes we wanted our potential child to have. It took us two weeks. That's a long time compared to some couples however I've heard of others that take the full month to decide. We sat down at the kitchen table every evening after work with a tablet between us, scrolling through rows and rows of different options. It felt like we were designing a new home, not a person.

Obviously, we didn't pick the gender. We're not important enough to be allowed. For us mere mortals, our child's gender is dependent on how many girls and boys were conceived already that week. It must be balanced out properly.

Carter was disappointed when we found out we were having a girl. He wanted a boy who he could name after his father, Darwin. But our second child will be a boy, if we're allowed one. So, we can still have the argument over that name then.

I really don't like the name Darwin and I don't want to name my child after my father-in-law. He's a bully. Whenever, he and Ava come over, I count down the minutes until they leave, watching him attack her like a virus infecting a hard-drive, chip by chip and then suddenly overloading the system so that her colour drains and she sneaks off to take medication in the bathroom. I don't want my child to be like him, not even in name.

We've picked her a name and a back-up, just in case, as recommended. We did everything by the book, by *The Book* in fact. Of course, we did. Why would we risk stepping out of line and losing our baby?

Though, we have passed the twenty-week mark now so we can relax a little bit. You don't hear many stories of a couple losing their baby after twenty weeks. In fact, I only remember one. Last year, a couple lost their child when it was discovered they were hiding cigarettes.

I was shocked. I thought all cigarettes had been destroyed in the thirties. Apparently not. Apparently somehow, people still smuggle some in and they fetch a high price on the black market.

When we heard the story on the news over dinner, my first thought was for the mother. They were only six weeks away from the birth. We weren't expecting the baby then, we'd just started the Parenting Tests. However, for a long while I'd been yearning for a child like a starving person yearns for food, not only a desire to be fulfilled but a need to be sated. I shuddered at the thought of losing a child so close to birth.

Carter rolled his eyes 'Stupid people.'

I looked at him, shocked he didn't feel a gram of sympathy for them. 'It was just a couple of cigarettes

in a drawer. Who says they were even smoking them?  
And now they've lost their child'

'You mean *cancer sticks*. Just think how much it costs the NHS to care for the consequences. If they are that reckless with their own health, they shouldn't be allowed children.'

I said nothing.

He continued 'Dad was in the US for work last month. They smoke like chimneys there, he said it was disgusting. Especially as there's so many of them. He said you could hardly move for the people and you can see death hovering around everybody like a bad smell. That's what happens when you let just anyone procreate.'

As he spoke, my Wrist Monitor started to light up. First yellow - irritation. Then annoyance orange and then the scarlet of anger. My blood pressure was soaring.

Across the table, he glanced down at my Monitor. 'It makes me angry too' he said, 'They're killing our planet and there's nothing we can do to stop them.' He paused before smirking slightly and adding nonchalantly, 'Unless we go to war.'

I moved my wrist under the table. The light was flashing the bright, dark claret of pure, unadulterated rage and I didn't want him to see. I watched as the mask of the person I thought he was give way to the

truth of who he is. I felt like a drunk person sobering up to harsh reality.

'Ah well' He smiled at me and picked up the bottle of wine, 'Would you like your second glass now?' he asked as he topped up his own.

I shook my head, 'No, thank you' I murmured, still claret. 'We've got another Test tomorrow, I want to keep a clear head.'

His smile widened, 'Very Logical' he replied.

Since then, I've felt myself doubting our marriage more and more frequently. Even when we were notified of the result of our attempts to become parents.

I couldn't bear to look at the email and just wanted to enjoy a few more minutes of not knowing. I was so afraid of what it might say, I felt myself shaking and tried to pull him away from the tablet. But he pushed me away, clicked on the email and began to read aloud, ignoring my protests.

'Dear Mr and Mrs Ruskin,

Having undertaken the Parenting Assessment Tests, we are pleased to inform you that you have been selected to become parents. Congratulations. Your child will be conceived in the next week and you will be informed after.

The Department of Reproduction'

It was lucky I saw his true self only after we took the Marriage Assessment part of the Tests. I'm sure it would have picked up on my doubts, I've always been a terrible liar and they monitor every fractional movement of your body. I'd have given my doubts away. Then we wouldn't be getting a baby but a divorce and who knows if I'd be married again by the time I was forty-two?

Nowadays you need to be married for three years before you can be Considered For Parenthood. They keep adding more and more hoops you have to jump through before you can be Considered. The government are terrified about Overpopulation.

They don't let you become a mother after forty-five any more. It isn't Logical for a woman to be chasing around a child when she's nearing fifty and her energy levels are beginning to decrease.

I found some old newspaper articles at work about women in their fifties and sixties having babies. I was shocked because that was back when babies still grew inside their mothers. When women were pregnant.

Pregnant; it's such a strange word. I love old words: ague, afeared, egad, rapsallion, begot, blessed, pregnant. They all sound strange and mysterious yet oddly comforting. Perhaps that's why I got a job in the Central Library, so I could be

surrounded by words. It wasn't easy, books are so rare, we only have one library per city.

Sometimes, on my way to visit the baby, I take a route past a block of flats that used to be one. In big Victorian letters 'LIBRARY' is chiselled into the stone. They put a glass box around it to stop the weather from wearing it down because they want us to remember how lucky we are to have all information at our fingertips.

I remember my school teacher telling us how people used to have to go look things up in the library 'and if somebody had checked out the book you wanted, you had to wait until they brought it back before you could find what you were looking for.'

Jasmine Campbell, the class swot, put up her hand and commented, 'That wasn't Efficient'

Mrs Lessing smiled at her, 'No, it wasn't. But you must remember, this is back before most of the technology we have now. People used to have to see their local doctors for all health checks. They had to book an appointment and sometimes you might have to wait a whole week to be seen.'

'Very Inefficient, Mrs Lessing.' Jasmine pronounced.

Mrs Lessing beamed. They might say Efficiency is second only to Logic but Mrs Lessing seemed to

believe in the power of Efficiency far more. Jasmine knew what to say to earn her praise. Harmony, my best friend, and I rolled our eyes. We found Jasmine insufferable.

Poor Jasmine Campbell. She would have made a really good mother actually, despite how awful we found her. Still, I always wondered about her mental health. It's amazing she managed to hide it from the Parenting Assessment Tests, especially as hers were more rigid than most. Hers and all the other women whose eggs were stored in the same container.

She was the first from our class to get her period. Off she went to hospital and when she returned, she flashed her scars in the changing room for P.E. with such self-satisfaction I wanted to push her into the showers.

She was an adult now, not like the rest of us. She wore this horrid smug smile until the day she was notified about the error in her container's software. She couldn't stop crying after that.

When I got my period and went away to have my eggs harvested, I was terrified the same thing would happen to me. The morning of the operation, I lay in bed and whispered to my stomach 'Stay safe, wherever they take you' even though I felt like an idiot, even though it was very far from Logical.

To be honest, I was surprised they let her have a shot at being a mother after that. Given how easily they deny people Parenthood. But she was an only child and it wasn't her fault her eggs died. If it was anybody's fault, it was the Laboratory's. And if it was the Laboratory's fault, then it was the NHS' fault and if it was the NHS' fault then it was the Government's fault, so they had to let her have a chance.

They should have picked a better egg donor. Just because her one cousin was her nearest female relative. They hated each other. I saw Harmony at a school reunion after everything happened; she told me Jasmine's cousin had spent their teens taunting her about her dead eggs. They should have taken that into consideration. However, they were too embarrassed by the whole error to do too much digging. No wonder Jasmine cracked when they took the baby home from the hospital and tried to smother him with a pillow.

Poor Jasmine Campbell. I wonder what she's doing now.

I can understand her yearning. I've been yearning for a baby since I understood the word. My brother, Brody, used to joke my cat was a substitute baby. He could never understand, he doesn't want kids.

I do oh so much. I pass mothers in the street and watch their children reach out for them, their faces full

of love and trust, and I feel a pain in my chest I know has no medical cause. I've held the children of my friends as babies and marvelled at the way their parents' features are reproduced in miniature. I want my own. I want to wipe their nose when they're sad, carry their sleeping form to bed and be the person they cry out for in fear, in sadness, in happiness, in excitement. I want to be called Mummy. And soon I will be.

So, why am I afraid I won't love her?

I don't know if I really understand what love is. I love Brody, of course, and I know that is love. We grew up in the same household, we have the same parents, the same childhood. We make cheese on toast the exact same way, remember scraps of the same secret language and both begin our birthdays with pancakes and ice cream, just as we were allowed when we were small. The scar I have in my hairline at the top of my neck is because he suggested we bounce on Mum and Dad's bed one day and I fell backwards on to the bedside table.

He claims it was my idea. It was his. I might not remember hitting my head but I remember the moments that led up to it. I also remember the moments after, when I came to on the floor and my Wrist Monitor was flashing the emergency blue and wailing the siren. I remember being terrified of the electronic voice that shouted every five seconds 'Take Cleo to hospital'. I even tried to take it off.

I remember tugging and tugging at the band until blood started running down my arm like the tears on my face. For the first time ever, I felt the tiny prongs that connected the Monitor to my bloodstream as I pulled and they rose up from my vein.

Then the Monitor started to wail even louder and shout 'Connection broken! Connection broken!'. I pulled harder and harder, trying to get the damn thing off, scratching away at my skin like an animal caught in a trap. Of course, I couldn't undo it.

When I got to hospital, every nurse and doctor that saw me told me in angry, shocked voices 'You must never try to take your Monitor off! Never!' They even had a psychiatrist come and talk to me about it. That worried them more than my head injury.

We nearly got taken away from Mum and Dad after that. For a year afterwards, we had cameras all over the house and a social worker came every week. We don't talk about it much but I think of it still.

The other day, I asked Brody in a whisper 'Do you think our Monitors have cameras?' He shrugged 'Maybe'. It was after that I started worrying about talking in my sleep.

I know what it is to love Brody but that's it. I'm not even sure I love Mum and Dad. I like them. I don't know

if I love them. I think about when they will die and feel...nothing.

If I can't love my parents, how can I love my baby?  
How can I teach her what love is?

As a child, I once asked Mrs Lessing about love and Logic. She told me love is the one thing that isn't always subject to Logic. She then added that if we do approach it with Logic we'll be less likely to get hurt. I had no idea what she meant until I saw her twisting the space on her finger where her ring used to be and guessed it had something to do with her divorce.

I did approach love Logically. I don't know anybody who got married without being Matched.

I'm not so sure it helped.

When a couple is expecting a baby, it is meant to bring them closer together. I'm finding the opposite. I painted her bedroom last weekend and all Carter did was stand around asking why we weren't getting a professional to do it.

'I want to do this for her. I want to build her nest.'

'Build her nest?! You're not a bird.'

'You know what I mean!'

Why did I marry him? Not that the alternatives were much better. Another of my highest percentage Matches was a guy who was constantly tapping at his

Wrist Monitor, convinced it was malfunctioning and there was something wrong with him. Until I met him, I thought hypochondriacs were a thing of the past, like midwives and apothecaries.

I found it really hard to be patient with him and I swear even his Monitor was losing it as the voice seemed to sigh every time it said, 'You are perfectly healthy'. I definitely couldn't marry him.

Nonetheless I'm regretting marrying Carter more every day. I really thought he was the right man for me. We Matched so well and unlike the others, I was actually excited to see him. I was excited at the thought of spending our lives together. He told me of his dreams for the future that were so similar to my own, I remember wondering if he had been built especially for me. We loved the same books, the same shows and music. At the end of our first date, we ended up singing *You, I And The Big Blue Sky* by Hare And Burke in his car. I'd never met anybody my own age who liked Hare And Burke before, not even Brody who calls them 'old and complicated'. But Carter did and when we sang together, both out of key and unable to hit the high notes, I could see my future stretch out before me in a hazy golden aurora and for the first time in my life I was excited to live it. He made my stomach feel odd and my heart race. I thought that was love. I was wrong.

Oh well, at least the sex is good.

He doesn't come and visit the baby with me. At first it bothered me; not any more.

In the tiny, dark room on the Maternity wing where she grows in her mechanical Womb, I've pinned hundreds of pictures around her. I bring a new one each time I go. When I enter, I turn off the soundtrack of our voices and, against the background hum of the machines, describe the picture.

Next to the Womb sits her first Wrist Monitor on a pedestal. It is tiny. We choose lilac. It was one of the few things we have agreed on recently. The two small silver prongs on the inside flash in the light. They look sharp and jagged but they comfort me. They will keep her healthy all her life.

They will know her better than I; what is in her blood, what vaccinations she needs, when her body is working, when it isn't, if and when she'll need her collection of stem cells taken at birth. They will know everything about her and give me all the answers I need to care for her, except how to best to love her.

Sometimes, and this will sound really daft, I stand behind the machine and wrap my arms around it, as if I am carrying her inside of me. I've seen pictures of pregnant women in the old books at work. I pretend my feet are swollen and my bladder is bursting and my energy levels low, like how women used to feel. I imagine the swelling in my breasts as my milk comes

in is thanks to the baby growing inside of me and not the pills I take daily. Then, I wrap my arms around the machine and cradle her as close to me as possible.

If I close my eyes at that point, I can almost believe I am truly alive for the first time in my life as I grow her inside of me, and not dead and robotic as I really am.

Sometimes, when I do that, the sides of the Womb ripple and she kicks. I think she knows it's me.

## About the author

Rosanna Wood is a London-based writer and actor. She writes short stories, plays and screenplays and is working on the final draft of two books. When she is not writing, she is performing - sometimes comedy, sometimes not, sometimes improvised, sometimes not. Around this, she finds time to travel and indulge her hobby of photography.

@Rosanna\_\_Wood

## Inspiration

I wrote this story as I'm interested in the power and persuasion of logic over feeling and how that might come into play in medical practice. I'm also interested in the future of reproductive science and reproductive rights as our global population increases.