

# Blueberry

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Here we are, again, standing half-asleep in the dark on the edge of the lawn, watching the dog pee. He looks back at us as he leans forward. In the first weeks after we brought him home, we would do our best to avoid eye contact while he relieved himself: an earnest—if silly—attempt to respect his privacy. We didn't know then that dogs are not modest. Later, we read in a book that the reason he looks back is to confirm that we're paying attention. He's making sure that we can protect him while he's at his most vulnerable. Now we know to meet his eyes, give him a little nod, and tell him good boy as he shakes off and trots back toward us.

At seven weeks, the fetus is roughly the size of a blueberry. Its skin is thin as parchment. Far too delicate to support the weight of a name. So for now, it's Blueberry. We say it casually; our little joke. Just behind it, tickling our tongues, is the name we picked out months before on a plane, newlyweds on our way to a wedding.

The nervous parents in the next row introduced us to their infant daughter—likely an attempt to bank some good will ahead of any potential meltdowns during the next four hours. But the baby was content throughout the entire flight, waking from naps only long enough to play peek-a-boo in the gap between seats. Let's have one like that one, we laughed.

We're not superstitious, but we won't tempt fate. So for now, it's Blueberry.

Here we are, again, standing in the dark, watching the dog pee. Even under a full moon, his little black body disappears into the shadows of the house. We track his location by the moonlight reflecting off his eyes, and by the sound of his pee spattering in the grass. It's a quiet neighborhood.

Here we are, again. The dog. The saturated patch of grass. Good boy.

And here we are, again. The moon. The shadows. He spots a rabbit this time. His body stiffens; his jaw sets. Easy... we warn him.

And again. And again. How many times have we been here, watching our little dog pee in the dark?

We do the quick, rough calculations, based on how many nights since we brought him home. Factoring in the first few months, when he required more than one trip to the backyard each night, and the rare occasions that he sleeps more than a few hours straight, maybe... One hundred-and-sixty times?

Or maybe not.

We read in a book that the way people have traditionally perceived time is inaccurate. That past, present, and future are all equal. What's more, they're arbitrary.

It might seem that watching our dog pee in the dark this night is simply one of a host of countless moments experienced throughout one continuously unfolding lifetime, but that isn't correct; there is no single lifetime. There are countless lifetimes, each of them only a moment long. And there are countless iterations of us, each of them given one of those momentary lifetimes to live. We're not an individual; we're a composite.

Sitting on the toilet. Mowing the lawn. Having sex for the first time. Having sex for the best time. Some of us spend our entire existence on hold with customer service. Some of us exist only to lie awake in the middle of the night, worrying about money. Some of us exist to stand half-asleep in the backyard, watching the dog pee.

She was ambivalent about having kids. We were not. But the issue was purposely left unresolved, even after the engagement. We needed her to know that, regardless of her decision, we wanted her most. So if not becoming a parent was the cost of admission to a life with her, we were happy to buy that ticket.

According to the book, the problem with people is that we're too self-involved. We like to think that the future comes into existence only as we experience it. That there is nothing more important than the moment we're living. That we're existential pioneers, forging ahead and illuminating the darkness before us merely with our presence.

The reality is that everything that will ever happen has already happened. We're not forging ahead at all. Every person who ever has or ever will live is—for all practical purposes—standing still and facing backward, where we can only see the moments that came before the one we have been given. But because these other selves we see look so similar to us, we mistake them for ourselves. We claim ownership of their moments. We bind them together in our mind like a flipbook, and we call it a life.

At ten weeks, the fetus is the size of a secret. At ten weeks, there is a realization that loving something together—even something not much larger than a blueberry—is a new way to love one another. We place our palm on her belly long before there's any real belly to speak of.

At ten weeks, the fetus is as dense as a black hole, pulling in joy and hope and fear as quickly and violently as they are produced.

Here we are, standing in the dark, on the edge of the lawn, watching the dog pee. Above us, the map of stars tilts, and the constellations chase one another a few degrees across the sky. We inhale humid summer air, and exhale a plume of icy condensation.

Occasionally, there are times like this one, with our eyes and our mind unfocused, when we don't know whether we're looking at what's in front of us—remembering what has already happened—or taking little glimpses over our shoulder, at what's to come.

We all get just one moment. One page in the flipbook. We don't get to choose it, and it's not fair.

So I'm sorry that this moment is yours: The one when the doctor says, "I'm sorry. I'm not finding a heartbeat."

Your moment is nausea and disbelief. Your moment is empty space beneath your feet. Your moment is the start of an ache that will not even begin to peak for a very long time. An ache that will lessen over time, with subsequent selves, but will never really leave us.

"I'm sorry. I'm not finding a heartbeat."

The doctor says it once, but you hear it over and over.

Here we are, taking a break from wedding planning to politely attend a dance recital for our friends' children.

Midway through the program, a three-year-old in a pink leotard breaks ranks with her classmates and runs back and forth from one side of the stage to the other, stopping at abrupt intervals to frown intently through the footlights into the audience.

We laugh ourselves to tears. Out of nowhere, she slips her hand into ours. She presses her lips to our ear, and she says, "I want to have a baby with you."

That is a good moment. That is a perfect moment. We have those, too.

"I'm sorry. I'm not finding a heartbeat."

It is a small comfort, but in your moment, your eyes are fixed on the ultrasound screen, so you are spared seeing the look on her face. That will be another's burden.

And you have her hand wrapped in yours.

Those of us who are familiar with her hands know what a gift it is to hold them. Perfectly proportioned, beautifully tapered fingers. Strong, manicured nails. Some of us never get to experience what it's like to hold one of those perfect hands. So even with your stomach lurching and your eyes burning, you at least have that privilege.

"I'm sorry. I'm not finding a heartbeat."

This moment will not be the worst one. There will be moments when you and she will be apart. Ugly moments full of ugly thoughts that you will not speak of, even with each other.

Here we are, not long after we met her. That week she was between apartment leases, and office renovations left her to work from home for the same stretch of days that she didn't have one. That week when, even though it was so soon it seemed like it should be a really bad idea, she stayed in our little basement apartment with us for five days.

Here we are, coming home from work and opening the door to her reclining on the couch, computer on her lap, hair turned up in a messy bun.

What if the enormity of a single moment is too much for just one of us to grasp? Could the weight of that moment be shared, if every iteration of us were to somehow face the same direction and live it together?

Because something strange happens in that moment, looking at her on the couch. Suddenly it feels like we're all facing the same direction. Though we had practically just met her, in that moment we had seen her in this exact pose countless times. We see the features of her face flicker through decades, millions of iterations of her, every one of them familiar. We barely know her, but we see an entire lifetime lived together, and we're calmed.

The reverberations of that moment are felt by all of us, but none more than by those of us who are alone. The quiet echo of seeing her there on the couch is what gives so many of us hope. A tiny ripple of a feeling assuring us that, eventually, she would be there.

And here she is.

At ten and a half weeks, the fetus is the shape of the two of us curled up together on the couch with our little dog, waiting for it to be over. We hold on to each other tight for days, trying to stitch ourselves together using all the same things that could just as easily tug us apart.

"I'm sorry. I'm not finding a heartbeat."

Trailing the dull rage comes resignation. You are not the first or the only one of us to feel that he is being justly deprived of a happiness he has not earned. You are not alone in your irrational certainty that this is a punishment meant for you, and that you should be ashamed for sharing it with her.

I'm sorry that this is your moment. If I could, I would share another one with you.

Try to imagine a moment when the doctor says something entirely different.

A moment when her perfect hand—wrapped in yours once again—gives an excited, involuntary squeeze.

Imagine that, in this moment, you are looking at her face. You see the change in her eyes when the hiss of white noise from the sonogram's crackling speaker is broken by the sound of a tiny heart galloping at one-hundred-eighty beats per minute.

If you can imagine that moment, try to imagine the one that comes next. And the one after that.

Do this over and over, for as long as you can, until suddenly... here she is.

Here she is, just ahead and behind you, waiting for a name.