

# ALMOST PREGNANT

*By*

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# ALMOST PREGNANT

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# ALMOST PREGNANT

*for my mother Rachel and my daughter Rachel  
and all those who face infertility*

## ALMOST PREGNANT

*Almost Pregnant* was originally produced at the Old City Jewish Arts Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as part of a traveling art exhibit on infertility called A.R.T. (Assisted Reproductive Technology).

A full-length production of *Almost Pregnant* premiered at the Philadelphia Fringe Festival at the Adrienne Theatre with the same cast. Both productions were directed by Hamutal Posklinsky. It featured the following cast:

Becca..... Claire Golden Drake  
Lucky..... Marc C. Johnston  
Estrogen..... Kellie Cooper  
Violinist..... Gabe Kaplan

The Squeaky Bicycle's Velodrome Developmental Lab, in Manhattan, accepted *Almost Pregnant* for their 2020 season devoted to plays about reproductive rights.

The Dramatist's Guild produced a staged reading of *Almost Pregnant* as part of their virtual Showcase productions with the same cast and director.

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CAST: 2 WOMAN AND 1 GENDERLESS ROLE  
OPTIONAL ON-STAGE MUSICIAN

**BECCA:** Early 40's. A married Jewish woman, an artist and writer, who is 41 when she narrates the story about her life and her quest to become a mother.

**ESTROGEN:** No Specific age. The puppet/character/chorus. A dimension of Becca's internal mind as she wrestles with questions about infertility, motherhood and bioethics. Also plays Pam, a Catholic woman; Gabi, the Israeli cousin; Becca's mother, and others.

**LUCKY:** No gender or age requirements. The innocent puppet and character/chorus; dimension of Becca's internal mind as she wrestles with questions about infertility, motherhood, and bioethics. Also plays Infertility Doctor, Administrator, and other characters.

**"GOD"/MUSE:** On-stage violinist/musician who accompanies characters through the show.

**TIME:** Early 21<sup>st</sup> century, CIRCA 2009

**PLACE:** United States of America

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## PROLOGUE

**ESTROGEN AND LUCKY.** (*They tick tock slowly accelerating with anxious speed, not in synch, for about 30 seconds.*) Tick, tock, tick, tick, tick, tock.

**LUCKY.** What's that sound?

**ESTROGEN.** (*Quick-minded, sharp.*) Do you mean that tick tock, tick tock? (*Tick tock gets louder.*)

**LUCKY.** (*Slow, silly, obtuse, sensitive, childish.*) It's creepy. Sounds like a bomb.

**ESTROGEN.** (*Cheerfully dismissive.*) It's just Time, Lucky.

**LUCKY.** (*Ponderously, skeptical*) No. (*Listens and we hear more bells, and chimes, and tick tock gets louder and louder.*) I think it's something else.

**ESTROGEN.** Lucky, it's Time ticking away, clocks, bells, chimes, that's all. (*Firmly.*)

**LUCKY.** (*Pause.*) I beg to differ Estrogen. I think it's her...

**ESTROGEN.** Spit it out, Lucky.

**LUCKY.** Her...biological clock.

**ESTROGEN.** (*Mockingly.*) Or it could be a bomb ticking inside.

**LUCKY.** What's the difference?

**ESTROGEN.** Where are we?

**LUCKY.** It appears to be a room.

**ESTROGEN.** But it's dark.

**LUCKY.** It will be light soon.

**ESTROGEN.** *Parenting Magazine* with a smiling mother and her little bouncy boy. It's like putting *The Wine Enthusiast* out at an AA meeting, isn't it?

**LUCKY.** Or *Martha Stewart's Favorite Desserts* at a Weight Watcher's meeting. (*Sheepish.*) You said the word.

**ESTROGEN.** What word?

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**LUCKY.** (*Whispers.*) Mother.

**ESTROGEN.** Don't be superstitious. We're in a fertility waiting room, for God's sake.

**LUCKY.** You said that other word.

**ESTROGEN.** What word?

**LUCKY.** God.

**ESTROGEN.** What are you waiting for?

**LUCKY.** I'm waiting to give blood. Daily. Vials of it. (*Leans in, as if to frighten.*)

**ESTROGEN.** It is biblical, sacrificial, isn't it? We are making an offering here.

**LUCKY.** You hate giving blood.

**ESTROGEN.** I look away, count to ten, sing a song: "I've been working on the railroad." For some reason, when someone tells me, "quick, sing a song," that's always the song that comes into my head.

**LUCKY.** For me, it's that song: "I feel like a natural woman."

**ESTROGEN.** It's either too hot or too cold.

**LUCKY.** What is?

**BECCA.** (*Estrogen and Lucky step forward.*) The waiting room.

**LUCKY.** Remember the one with the TV set on the wall blaring some morning tabloid crap?

**ESTROGEN.** She slept with her mother's boyfriend!

**LUCKY.** And is pregnant with triplets!

**ESTROGEN.** Just the kind of thing infertile women wants to hear before breakfast.

**BECCA.** Before coffee. I've already had three shots in the abs.

**ESTROGEN.** What are you waiting for?

**LUCKY.** I'm waiting to see how many egg follicles have grown since I've been taking the hormones.

**ESTROGEN.** I am waiting for the ultrasound, that cold gel on the belly, the computer screen with my name flickering in the corner. It's so personal and cozy.

**BECCA.** In the waiting room, I'm waiting for a child.

**ESTROGEN.** I am waiting for the endless push of the speculum, the feel of the fingers, the prick of the needle. I am waiting to see what my chances

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are, the thrill of victory...

**LUCKY.** ...or the agony of defeat.

**BECCA.** In the waiting room, I'm waiting for a child.

**ESTROGEN.** Shhhh. I have become a specialist in waiting. It's the A.R.T— Assisted Reproductive Technology, art, get it, of...

**LUCKY.** Waiting. I get it.

**ESTROGEN.** They speak in tongues, these infertile people do. In code. It's a secret society of sub-fertiles, I tell you.

**LUCKY.** Doctors and fertility clinics love Acronyms, the Morse code of infertility talk.

**BECCA.** So, I'm in my 2WW after 7 AIs and 3 IVF's one with DE and I had a PFP so many times. I've checked my BBT and we're done with BD and B/W, had the dreaded HCG. My DH has been great. I have DOR and during the DPO, DPR, DPT, DP3DT. I was Dx'ed with ENDO, and after my EPT said I was pregnant, it turned it was a false positive. This time 'round I had an FF, Molly, and when she signed her emails FTTA, my heart just opened. My HCG wasn't good. IF is real and it's ignored. I mean, it affects like 7 million people in the US alone.

**LUCKY.** FTTA?

**ESTROGEN.** (*Sarcastic, explaining.*) Fertile Thoughts to All, Lucky.

**LUCKY.** (*Surprised.*) One in eight couples?

**ESTROGEN.** I have to drive home.

**LUCKY.** Then what?

**BECCA.** I'll lie down on my bed, peel myself open to check the viscosity of my fluids. My cream. My female jism.

**LUCKY.** (*He walks away.*) You are being vulgar.

**BECCA.** I'll call my husband. Call for him again. I'll say his name in two syllables, Daa-vid, sing-songy, like you're calling a child to the dinner table from playing outside, Daa-vid, come and get it!

**LUCKY.** (*Sarcastic.*) Sounds romantic.

**BECCA.** Oh, fertility sex is the best. Primo.

**LUCKY.** Don't forget to put your legs up.



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## ACT I SCENE 1

**BECCA.** I'm 29 years old. I've just moved in with my new boyfriend, to a new city. The boyfriend is a Jewish intellectual, a Woody Allen type. It's 2:11 am and we've just had sex. It's 2:27 am and I'm downstairs getting a glass of water.

**LUCKY.** It dawns on me something's missing.

**BECCA.** In the tumult of moving from New York City to Maryland, I realized...

**LUCKY.** (*Gasps and turns.*) I hadn't gotten my period in two months.

**ESTROGEN.** And I'm a regular bleeder. A new relationship, embryonic, the beginning, when it's sex, sex, sex, here and there, on the stairs, in the shower, in the car, you know how it goes.

**BECCA.** I wake Jake up and say I haven't got my period, it's missing, my blood, it's gone. He's not cool, he doesn't roll over and go back to sleep and say dreamily, so we'll have a baby, so, come here, baby... (*Becca explains to audience.*) Oh no, this man is going to run for political office one day, this man is three years younger than me, and 26 for a man is like 16 for a woman; there's at least a 10-year difference emotionally, developmentally. This man begins to pace back and forth, a naked, nebishy, tall Jewish man pacing, and I think:

**LUCKY AND ESTROGEN.** If he calls his mother, I'm outta here.

**BECCA.** He's fumbling with his jeans, sweat pouring off his face. Where are you going? He's driving to CVS to get a pregnancy test. (*They all walk en masse and share a facial expression.*) In the house alone, my things in boxes by the basement stairs, it dawned on me he hadn't yet created a space for me. I should have known then this was not daddy or marriage material. I waited for him to return, sitting half-naked on the leather couch, my flesh sticking to it. He hands me the bag. He doesn't look well. I sit down to pee. Nothing. (*Estrogen and Lucky start to pace.*) I turn the faucet on. Wait for the pee to flow. He knocks.

**LUCKY.** So?

**BECCA.** I begin to pee and quick, place the stick between my legs,

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trying to aim the pee on the stick to saturate it. I smell my urine fill Jake's bathroom, pull up my panties, look in the mirror—

**LUCKY.** —at my 29-year-old face.

**ESTROGEN.** Mascara-streaked.

**BECCA.** Tired. I look at the pregnancy test lying innocently on Jake's sink and see the colors begin to develop. I wish they'd disappear.

**LUCKY.** (*excited, hyper.*) Two parallel lines!

**ESTROGEN.** (*tone is 'what are you so excited about?'*) Two lines had appeared on the stick.

**LUCKY.** Such an abstraction.

**ESTROGEN.** What does this mean? Two lines?

**BECCA.** (*Estrogen and Lucky sing "walk the line, walk the line" behind her.*) Two pink lines appear like magic, and you read the lines as though they are hieroglyphic marks, and they tell you: You are pregnant, that Jake's sperm mixed with your eggs and that the beginning of an embryo is taking shape inside your body right now. (*They stop singing and dancing.*) I spent the next years walking, side-stepping land mines, bad men, handsome bachelors who didn't want to be fathers but liked sex, sex without reproduction that is. I walked those lines stiff-lipped, stoic, hysterical, angry. Walk the line, don't look down, it's a long way down, an abyss. I leave Jake's house. I walked into Planned Parenthood. Left two hours later, and there were no lines. I was still 29 years old, it was the end of summer, the end of love, little did I know I would spend half a decade trying to get pregnant, reproduction with and without sex, trying to make those two lines reappear, like magic, like science, like art. (*Estrogen and Lucky look at her compassionately, hug her, slow dance, a tender moment*). Years later I meet a man and fall madly in love. He wants to be a daddy, he's ready to start a family, we've both walked (*Becca rises.*) that line of losing mothers and fathers, so much loss, don't look down, and we walk and walk...into a fertility clinic. On our sixth date. There they tell me that my egg follicles look good. His sperm look good. (*Beat.*) Our first pregnancy ends in a miscarriage. Our second is ectopic. I had a miscarriage at 13 weeks with my third pregnancy. We moved to IUIs and more miscarriages. When I walk into the first

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waiting room I...

**ESTROGEN.** (*Angry and hostile.*) ...smell a familiar scent: the harsh scent of ammonia they use to clean the rooms. At 6:30 am the waiting room wrecks of it. It is then I am filled with the other space, that dark space on the 25th floor where I am sitting 6 weeks pregnant in a dark room. A room where I had gone to end something. I am 36-years old, in love, and infertile. I am waiting in a room, foreign and familiar, for a doctor to tell me stories she believes are true about my body. There will be money involved and needles and empty rooms. These rooms will live inside me forever.

**ESTROGEN.** How does 36 differ from 29?

**BECCA.** It is a different country. The baby fever, my biological clock had become a fire alarm, and I was a walking time-bomb, you could hear me tick-tocking. They would check me at airports.

**ESTROGEN.** (*Teasing, mocking tone.*) What's that sound, Lucky? A bomb?

**LUCKY.** (*Yelling at Estrogen, walks away.*) No, it's just that 30-something chick sipping her latte.

## SCENE 2

**BECCA.** (*To Estrogen.*) I was 36 but on a good day, in good light, I looked 30, 32. You tell me. (*Shows profile, lights dim.*) I was healthy, so fucking healthy you could make a kale shake inside my mouth, if you shook me upside down.

**LUCKY.** Yeah, but old eggs don't really know they're in uber fit bodies. (*Becca is deflated, hurt.*)

**LUCKY/ADMINISTRATOR.** (*Estrogen and Lucky make a backbend shape together.*) Hello, Becca. Dr. Kraterman told me to tell you, ah, that you're pregnant.

**ESTROGEN/ADMINISTRATOR.** Wait, can you hold.

**BECCA.** I'm waiting...Honey, we're pregnant.

**LUCKY/ADMINISTRATOR.** Hello? Well, can you come into the office?

**ESTROGEN/ADMINISTRATOR.** The doctor wants to talk with you.

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**BECCA.** Am I pregnant or not pregnant?

**ESTROGEN AND LUCKY/ADMINISTRATOR.** You are...almost pregnant.

**BECCA.** Welcome to the world of infertility. You are walking the line, living in the aggravating always in between place of being almost. Almost pregnant, almost a mother, almost broke, almost broken. (*Angry beat.*) You are living a liminal life. Liminal: to be on the threshold, almost, standing right in the doorway. We sit across from Dr. Kraterman, a little birdish, silver-haired fast-talking woman, and she leans in—

**LUCKY.** This can't be good.

**ESTROGEN/DR. KRATERMAN.** You are pregnant, which is good, your body still knows how and wants to make a baby, but your pregnancy is ectopic.

**BECCA.** (*To Lucky.*) That means, the embryo is growing outside of your uterus, which is not good. In your fallopian tubes.

**ESTROGEN/DR. KRATERMAN.** So, we will have to watch out, hopefully it will stop growing and take care of itself.

**BECCA.** (*To doctor.*) Nothing takes care of itself. (*To audience.*) This is how we were initiated into the world of infertility, with an ectopic pregnancy. See, when there is no oops pregnancy surprise moment in your life, when you're sore and tired and trying not to be consumed by babies (*She rises.*) and baby making and charting your body temperature, and fingering yourself to see what condition your cervical mucous is in, when missing your period is a Godsend, not a curse, when getting the so-called curse is the monthly curse, then you, as a decent citizen of a country that loves all things baby and mommy and kiddies, begin to wonder why.

**ESTROGEN.** (*Estrogen and Becca need to talk at the same time: two simultaneous monologues, and Lucky is torn between them.*) Why do you want the poopy diapers, the sleepless nights...

**BECCA.** People who get pregnant just by having ho hum ordinary sex on a slow TV night during the summer have no idea of the self-conscious machinations infertile folks go through, often for years. We turn ourselves inside out after every failed IVF cycle wondering: Is this

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the right path, the right fate? Or maybe we're being punished.

**ESTROGEN.** ...the financial burden, the soccer, ballet, social studies, Winnie the Pooh, the \$15 per hour babysitters who leave the place a mess, the toddler tantrums, the potty training, play dates!

**BECCA.** While fertile breeders out there are having their third kid between the afternoon iced Latte and a trip to Ikea, not giving much deep thought to the why question.

**ESTROGEN.** Why do you want the other mothers, the obligatory social interaction with people you will have nothing in common with —except that both your kids are five?

**BECCA.** (*Yells this to Estrogen to disrupt the monologues.*) This is not a test and there is no right answer! (*She wins this battle.*)

**LUCKY.** Ok, ok, ok, ok, ok. (*Lucky calms her down and sits her down.*)

**BECCA.** After the ectopic pregnancy, my love and I are moving on to IUI. The doctor takes the sperm and sticks it up there, way up high inside you, to help it meet the egg.

**ESTROGEN.** This should work.

### SCENE 3

**LUCKY.** It's a Sunday in February. We're in the car—

**ESTROGEN.** —stuck behind a police line blocking off the road for the breast cancer parade.

**BECCA.** No fucking way this is happening. I have hot sperm between my legs inside a sock, and it's an hour drive to where I'm getting inseminated artificially.

**LUCKY.** We wait and wait ....

**ESTROGEN.** and wait and watch the parade until...

**BECCA.** (*Justifying what happened to Estrogen and Lucky.*) Yes, I jumped out of the car. Remember, I'm on hormone meds and I'm ovulating and it's Sunday morning at 8 am and I haven't had coffee because it's not so great for you while you're trying to get knocked up. I wave the bottle around and a police officer jogs slowly over. (*To audience.*)

**LUCKY.** (*Hops off bench; police officer voice.*) Ma'am, get back in your

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vehicle. (*Lucky stands very still.*)

**BECCA.** This is sperm. You will let us through to get to the clinic on time, so I can open my legs and get turkey basted, pregnant and live my domestic fantasy life, or I will...By the time I finished he was schlepping the big orange cones out of the way and guiding me through traffic. All the bald ladies waved. One might have given me the finger. Hell, she's entitled. She's looking at death in the eye and we're trying to look at new life.

\*

**ESTROGEN/OFFICE MANAGER.** (*Encouraging tone.*) Be romantic with your partner tonight.

**BECCA.** (*Broken, emptied*) This was a voice message I received from the fertility office manager, after the tests came back indicating we were ovulating. It's difficult to "be romantic" when you're undergoing infertility treatments, because you are in a utilitarian business state of mind. You're goal oriented: the mission is to have a child, not necessarily an orgasm.

**ESTROGEN/CHERYL.** (*Makes it clearer, firmer.*) Be romantic with your partner tonight.

**BECCA.** We do our best like a good student who does her homework. We have intercourse. When it's over you lift your legs up into the air and he holds them for you, stroking them, coaxing the sperm to find an egg, any egg and fall in love. Like you did, all those years ago. Another planet ago. When romance was different. And your womb wasn't the inner rebel force turning against you, refusing to be filled, to fulfill your dream. We're having no luck with the IUIs. We've done...8 cycles, no 9, 10? I've lost track. I'm 37 now. The Chlomid makes me bloated, tired, moody. It's all I think about it. I am consumed with infertility. We're putting one foot in front of the other, taking it one step at a time, walking the line, not looking down...We switch clinics from the one in Philadelphia to a new one in New Jersey that comes "highly recommended."

**LUCKY/DOCTOR.** It is recommended that you move on to IVF.

**BECCA.** What?

**LUCKY/DOCTOR.** (*Contemptuous tone.*) Given your age...and...medical history.

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**BECCA.** In vitro fertilization?

**LUCKY/DOCTOR.** It's simply taking control of your menstrual cycle by giving you hormones to stimulate your egg follicles to make more eggs.

**ESTROGEN.** Many more eggs.

**LUCKY/DOCTOR.** So we can extract them and fertilize them in our labs with your husband's sperm.

**ESTROGEN.** You are using your husband's sperm, right?

**LUCKY/DOCTOR.** Then we wait to see which of the embryos develops into nice, healthy blastocysts. You've seen the photos of these beautiful three-day embryos. Just stunning. Then they take one or two of these—God willing, grade A+ blastos, and we transfer them into your uterus. We wait two weeks to see if it implants, and 9 months later, say hello to baby. *(Estrogen peaks from under bench with baby smile.)*

### SCENE 4

**BECCA.** I hated him. *(Estrogen and Lucky respond like: why does she hate us, we were so good, Lucky slouches.)* He was a fertility doctor slash used car salesman. He was sickeningly slick, almost blasé about the process, which sounded clinical to us. And costly.

**ESTROGEN.** *(Angry, to audience)* Can anyone guess how much one IVF cycle cost?

**LUCKY.** One IVF cycle costs about \$15,000.

**BECCA.** *(Estrogen and Lucky dance a Wild West chaotic dance, flinging money into the air)* By the way, slick fertility doc has his own web page advertising sperm and egg donors, a whole menagerie of young fertile donors for hire. Does he get a cut? You bet your infertile ass he gets a cut. Oh yes, I can admit it now to you. I went through my paranoid phase during my IVF cycles: My doctor is nothing but a greedy entrepreneur and it's the wild west out there. Nothing is regulated, everyone pays and pays, except the poor, of course.

**ESTROGEN AND LUCKY.** What?

**ESTROGEN.** What do infertile lower middle-class folks who can't get knocked up do? Or one's with no health insurance?



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**LUCKY.** Don't you remember Auntie Dessie, how she was crying at mom's house on Thanksgiving...

**ESTROGEN.** Ohhhh. (*With wistful recognition, like it all makes sense now.*) (*Gabe/God knocks.*) Knock, knock. It's the pharmacy with the drug delivery.

**BECCA.** (*To audience.*) And it says in bold letters on the box, "Perishable. Please Refrigerate." The drugs and needles come wrapped in plastic with dry ice padding it. Follistim is the rock star of fertility hormones. I feel sick placing five thousand dollars' worth of sterile fertility medicine alongside the old cheddar cheese. I tear off a few sheets of bounty paper towels, shove the food to one side, and line up the boxes of meds.

**ESTROGEN.** Did anyone tell us what to do with all this stuff?

**LUCKY/ADMINISTRATOR.** You'll have to wait till Monday and come in so the Nurse can demonstrate with the orange.

**ESTROGEN.** The orange?

**BECCA.** Orange?

**ESTROGEN AND LUCKY/ADMINISTRATOR.** The orange!

**BECCA.** Orange? No, she didn't go over all this with the orange. (*Lucky walks away upstage.*) No wonder we're sitting here with five thousand dollars' worth of freshly delivered drugs, having cleaned the refrigerator out to store them, and now we're one tutorial with an orange away from achieving clarity over all of this, and some bureaucratic oversight, some fertility office screw up is screwing up my cycle this month. Now I'll have to wait until next month, until I start to bleed again, to begin a new cycle. Do you hear me? Do you understand? I know it's Sunday. And you are doing whatever it is you do with your fucking children on Sundays, but I don't have children and I'm trying to make one, so please, please explain to me how to administer this Goddamned medicine!!! (*Violinist begins to play Dayenu. Becca breathes. Jewish music, maybe Dayenu riff, meaning "enough," from Passover Seder plays in background.*) In the middle of our first IVF cycle, Passover arrives. So there I am sitting at my cousin Judy's beautifully appointed Seder table. Beside the parsley, the bitter herbs, the hard-boiled egg, the lamb shank,



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the charoset, there it was: the orange.

**LUCKY.** Ooohh, I know, I know! It symbolizes the contribution of our foremothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah to our liberation.

**BECCA.** I am bloated, gassy, dizzy, and I'm feeling unliberated. My bisexual-rabbi-who-left-Wall Street cousin, Wendy was waxing poetic about why the orange was on our Seder Plate.

**ESTROGEN/WENDY.** This orange (*She holds it up.*) is a symbol to include lesbians into the Jewish community, but now it includes everyone who feels marginalized: the widow, the orphan.

**BECCA.** The childless? Does it include the childless?

**ESTROGEN/WENDY.** We don't use a navel orange; it has to have seeds to symbolize rebirth, renewal.

**BECCA.** And all I hear is the birth part, and I get very quiet inside, while Wendy's on a rabbinical roll.

**ESTROGEN/WENDY.** Spitting out the seeds reminds us to spit out the hatred and ostracization of LGBTQI in our community, and others who feel prejudice's sting.

**BECCA.** (*Raises her hand, excited and perturbed*) I feel the sting of prejudice, the sting of infertility, all the time, I mean every minute of every Goddamned day. The last time I held an orange I was pricking it with an IVF needle shooting blanks. It turns out an orange has much tougher skin than a human. And when my husband injected me the first time it really hurt. I threw the orange at him. (*Estrogen and Lucky duck.*) We learned towards the end of one cycle that if you ice the ass, it numbs the area and takes the sting away. Did you know that doctors grade the quality of the embryos? Well, they do, and I was so proud of our Grade A embryo I hung up its ultrasound photo on the fridge. Two weeks later I got my period. The photo remained. When our second IVF fails I took down the first photo and placed it in a photo album. They should call IVF "success" rates "failure" rates, to give women a true sense of the odds we face.

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER-- TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –  
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