

JANINE & THOMAS

HERE WE GO

Over the winter holidays, Ingrid, visiting from Germany, spent the night at Janine's apartment. They sat on the couch and drank glasses of wine and removed their shoes. Janine leaned back and placed her head on Ingrid's breastbone and Ingrid took up a fistful of Janine's hair and used her other hand to stroke Janine's throat. Something in Janine softened abruptly and she thought *oh, here we go*.

An hour later the tea lights began to gutter out, and they stretched out on the blanket on the floor and watched the shadows on the ceiling flicker, and Ingrid talked about the problems that her and Elsa have been having, the problems that have delayed their marriage.

—I think, she said, while Janine began to kiss a trail down her legs, —I think that part of her issue isn't so much *having a kid* as it is the fact that I wouldn't want to adopt. I'd want the child to be at least partially ours, you know, to have one of us in it? But the whole idea of *pregnancy* kind of wigs her out; any time I even bring up the *idea* of artificial insemination she's just like *no*.

Janine took her mouth off of Ingrid's toe and said —I could loan Thomas out to you. He's fun.

That was three months ago. Tonight: Janine backs Thomas up against the kitchen counter. —Kiss me, she says. —Kiss me like we're about to die.

Earlier she sat at her workstation, ten stories up, behind concrete and glass, drinking coffee and reading an e-mail from Ingrid. Outside spring has finally cracked through winter. A sparrow hops along the black metal of the window's ledge. Ingrid writes *I'm worried about you. I really think you should get out of the US while you can. I don't know how things look over there but from my perspective over here things look pretty bad. There's going to be fallout from this war. I can't predict what, but I wouldn't want to be in a US city right now.*

A co-worker's radio reports that foreign diplomats have begun evacuation of Iraq; citizens of Baghdad have begun hoarding food, fuel, medical supplies. She wishes that she could reach over and turn it off.

That night, standing against the counter, hips pressed together, she lets Thomas kiss her fiercely for a minute, before she turns him around, pulls his wrists behind his back, pushes his head down, forces him to bend over; he thrashes and hits a canister full of wooden spoons and ladles, knocking it over; shit clatters to the floor; she doesn't give a fuck; she holds his wrists with one hand and pushes the fingers of her other one into his mouth.

A few minutes later they will end up in bed; she will stick a silicone thing up his ass and then climb on top of him; they will not pause for a condom and they will both feel surprised by this, but not until after he comes inside her.

—I'm sorry, he says.

—Fuck it, she says, and she lifts herself off of his cock and slides up his chest, painting a wet stripe on him.

—But, he says.

—Don't worry about it, she says.

And she nestles in at his side and wonders what it would be like to be pregnant. She can't say that the idea doesn't appeal on some level. She has a definite sense of how a baby would feel inside her body; she can clearly imagine the erotic pulse of it. She almost wouldn't say *imagine*; she's quite sure that she *knows* how it would feel. She can't say where this knowledge comes from, but she's certain of its accuracy.

She begins to drift off, still indulging in thoughts of her and Thomas as parents, wondering what the baby would end up looking like. She sees it as beautiful, aligns it in her mind against the images of horror and death that creep inside her always, the black foam of skull-faces and emaciated bodies that bubbles and rises in her every time the newscasters talk about war. A beautiful baby, emerging slickly from her, black hair shining and gleaming. *We affirm life with the body*, she thinks. *With fucking. With procreating.*

She is almost asleep when Thomas gets up. She listens to him go rummaging in the kitchen. Glass clinking; the sound of the freezer opening. —You're out of gin, he calls, faintly, in the voice of a sad little boy.