

(We hear a massive wave about to crash crescendoing into the sound of pee)

Her: 1...2...3....4....5. Lay flat...3 minutes.
Okay, so one line is a no, two lines is a positive.

(We hear a phone timer being set, the sound of a toilet flushing, washing hands)

Her: Haven't done one of these since I was twenty.Ten years ago. I was so scared. I remember being in the pharmacy on campus.I circled the aisle for ages, putting off picking up the box. Chickening out whenever a real adult entered the aisle. Pretending to be seriously contemplating foot fungus creams.

By the time I got up to the cash, my basket was full. A pumice stone and tinfoil and a face wash and 50% off greek yogurt. Oh, and a pregnancy test, very casual. Just terrified. I had a bad feeling already that time. I'd had a bit of a summer.

This was back in the 2010s when summer in BC didn't just mean fire season. Before it escalated from "global warming" to " climate change" to "climate crisis." Back when scientists said we had 12 years to turn it around. A lot's changed.

Last time the choice was easy. I made an appointment, I did what I had to do. But this time...

The word choice is very weird when you really think about it. Choice. It would be a beautiful girl's name in an alternate universe. We think of choice as such a positive, obviously, pro-choice, the right to choose.

But in the grand scheme of the world, choice is new. The pill wasn't approved in Canada until 1969, the year that my parents graduated from high school. Abortion wasn't really legalized here until 1988, after my brother was born. Choosing hasn't been around that long but just in the blip of my own lifetime, the choice is complicated in a new way.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: There is scientific consensus that the lives of children are going to be very difficult. And it does lead I think young people to have a legitimate question. Y'know, should...is it okay to still have children?

Her: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez asks: is it okay to still have children?

It's a question I've been thinking about for years. Talking circles around it with my partner, with my family, with my friends. It's precarious sitting on the fence for so long.

Hannah: It's interesting because I have friends who have decided not to because of climate change, so I'm always so curious to talk to like everyone who's like considered the choice cause it's like, how do you come to that decision? Like how do you feel about it after? Or like, I don't know. Cause it's like something I literally think about every day.

Her: My cousin Hannah, years ago, in her little apartment in Vancouver. She was on the fence too. Or maybe it's not a fence, but a tightrope. If you keep your eyes trained straight ahead, you're fine.

She tops up my sake and pulls her knees into her chest. Her husband putters around, clearing the table with headphones in, I guess to give us privacy.

Hannah: It's like a tug of war in my brain and like it honestly can change sometimes like by the week or something, like when I'm really in a loop of reading constant news or story after story that's just so devastating, it kind of furthers me. And sometimes there's a week where I'm like every day it's like fully like, yes, like, you know what, things are gonna turn around. It could be this like a whole kind of new envisioning of how people live. It could be this amazing thing. And then like the next week it's like very gloomy and pessimistic.

Her: Do you guys feel the same way about it?

Hannah: I would say I am far more anxious about it than he is.

Her: She watches her husband moving around the kitchen.

Hannah: Like I think it was like early this fall. It was like, it was so sad and like came home and was crying. It was kind of like, I don't think I can like do this, like have a kid. Ah, you're gonna make me get all emotional. And then, kind of like left it at that. And then it was almost like the next day I felt a lot better. Like just kind of like going into that place and being like, it's not gonna happen. And then I don't know, but then it's almost like voicing that is necessary or something.

Her: She tops up her own sake.

Hannah: Sometimes I think of like me in the future, if I'm pregnant and then just being like filled with fear and sadness. Like I'll go down such a rabbit hole with it where I'll be, you know, be in a vortex. Yeah. Like it's something that I feel very excited, like so excited to do and also like a lot of like, not dread of having a baby, but like dread of like, fear that you'll have a baby. And then like when they're like 18, they'll be like, why would you do this?

Her: Why would you do this?

What if we do it and they're sad all the time?

What if they are scared for their whole life?

What if they regret my choice?

What if there's nowhere left to live?

Hannah: Why would you do this?

Her: What if the other kids make fun of them?

What if they have a hard time making friends?

Hannah: Why would you do this?

Her: What if they're curious and gentle and goofy?

(We hear a baby cooing)

Her: My cousin Hannah is off the fence now. She had her baby.

(Music plays. A timer sound goes off.)

Her: Two lines. Positive.

(She inhales, and as she exhales, we hear a giant wave crashing, carrying with it a woosh of sounds; a strong wind, a baby crying, explosions)

Her: The timer has started. I can feel it ticking down. I suspect we're at week five? six? So I have a bit of time to decide. But not a lot. It's February now. I can give myself until the snow melts.

Lynne: Well, I'm a mum. As you know. I love being a mum, and um it's a really cool thing.

Her: Lynne Quarmby is a cell biologist and a family friend. I've pulled her away before a dinner at my parents' house. We sit in the TV room, knee to knee on opposite couches, I put my wine down so my hands won't give away that they're shaking. I'm nervous talking to Lynne because she knows a lot, the dark knowledge of those who study the climate.

Lynne: I think there is a...well obviously there is a strong biological drive, we feel the urge really deeply at a certain period in our life, not everybody feels it, not everybody feels it the same, but I felt it really strong, like I really wanted to have a baby. But knowing what I know about the climate, I think if I was at that age now, what decision would I make? Ah, oh my god I would be ripped apart by it, but I think I probably, I, I, I wouldn't do it.

Her: What do you feel when you see someone that you're... a friend, someone in your circle who becomes pregnant or has a kid now, do you have a-

Lynne: I have a strong reaction, I feel really sad.

Her: What's the sadness about?

Lynne: I feel really sad because I think those babies are gonna have a hard life.

Her: I don't tell her about my situation.

Her: Are there specific parts of that part of life that come to mind?

Lynne: Um, well I think it is a slow creep, I think we adapt, I mean it's part of why humans have been so quote-unquote successful, is that we really adapt very easily to changing conditions. And so, we forget, we don't notice diminishment.

I realize how much I in my lifetime have witnessed diminishment in nature. And diminishment in many ways, in quality of life, in expectations. So I don't envision a sudden apocalyptic scenario, uh, Bladerunner type things, that's not what I fear for these babies, I just fear that every year, for example if we think about food. Every year the spectrum of food choices will be smaller, things will become a lot more more expensive.

I hate the idea that economic privilege will protect people, and I argue against that, but in my heart I think that's a reality for a lot of what's going to happen. I think that obviously economic privilege doesn't protect you from everything and when natural disasters strike we're all hit, but it's the slow creep where food gets really expensive, people are hungry, there's more nastiness and competition, and we live in smaller spaces, we're higher density, lives just get smaller and smaller.

Her: Maybe smaller could be good? Maybe we can adapt?

The uterus can stretch from the size of a lemon to the size of a watermelon. The body morphs, the guts push aside, the skin stretches and stretches and stretches leaving only silver lines to hint at where it found the space. Maybe we can change too.

There's this point in the third trimester when the body fills a hormone called relaxin to help the pelvis widen in advance of the birth. But in service of softening and opening, some people's hip bones then grind against their nerves, shooting sciatica pain as the hips and back separate. The process of accommodating, changing, morphing isn't necessarily pleasant.

I'll tell them bedtime stories about the lost worlds of Atlantis, Miami, Osaka, Rio de Janeiro. Fantasies of Unicorns, dragons, polar bears, snow leopards, sea turtles. The melting ice releasing ancient plagues, smallpox, the black death. Mosquitos fly north bringing dengue to Vancouver. We'll take those malaria pills that give you nightmares and wake up in a new nightmare unfolding.

It's hot, it's too hot. Throw off the covers in the middle of the winter. We'll keep the fan running all night, and watch the mobile in the nursery spin and spin and spin.

I tell my partner.

So, yeah.

Him: How do you feel?

Her: I don't know.

Him: What do you want to do?

Her: I don't know.

Host: Expectant is written and performed by Pippa Johnstone. Composition by Laura Reznek. Sound design and mixing by Robyn Edgar. Dramaturgical support from Karina Palmitesta.

Next time on Expectant:

Colin: There's something where like my mom gave me a better childhood than she had. I cannot give a child the same childhood that she gave me. And there's other ways that I can be involved in kids' lives and enrich the lives of youth. And again, I think I would have enjoyed children, but like I do, like I do enjoy children. There are many children in my life and I enjoy them all.