

(We hear a chime. Quiet glasses clinking, chatter.)

Her: We're at dinner with friends. We don't tell them. It's too early to tell anyone anyways. And maybe there's nothing to tell.

(Music plays in the background)

Friend 1: Did Andy tell you his brother is having a third?

Him: No.

Friend 1: Did you hear about this?

Friend 2: Oh my Christ, could you imagine three?

Friend 3: Oh, they're getting a minivan.

Friend 2: I mean, they needed a bigger car.

Friend 3: No of course, I'm just saying. A minivan.

Friend 1: They're going to have to like plastic-cover the seats.

Friend 2: No but seriously, why would you do that? Not to be an asshole, but why would you do that to your life?

Friend 1: Okay, you can't say that!

Friend 2: They look like they've aged like twenty years in the last five.

Friend 1: Stop!

Friend 2: I'm just saying.

Friend 3: Everyone want wine?

All: Yeah, yes, thank you.

Her: Yes please

Yes please.

I feel his hand on my leg under the table as if to ask, really?

I don't turn my head.

(Car sounds.)

Her: The ride home I don't want to talk about it. I stare at my phone the whole way. Scrolling Reddit.

Redditor 1: Feeling guilty about wanting to be a mom because of climate change. If climate change's impact is as bad as predicted and based on the impacts we're already seeing, I can't even imagine. Has anyone else been feeling this way? Just want to know I'm not crazy.

Redditor 2: It's not the same decision that our parents had to make. I have no idea what kind of world we're gonna have in twenty years.

Redditor 3: The whole world is dying, and if it doesn't, the next centuries or so will be a mix of climate catastrophe, hunger, and violence. Do I want a child that will just be old enough to remember the abundance while growing up, and then the deprivation, stress and trauma of everything that follows?

Redditor 4: I'm so scared to bring someone into this world that will only suffer and have to compete violently with other humans for resources. Do we need more soldiers for the water wars?

Redditor 5: I had my kids before the climate crisis felt like an immediate threat and now I really struggle with my choice. If you are not sure you want kids, don't have kids.

Her: I exit every app and throw my phone down.

Can you pull over?

(The car parks.)

Her: What if we didn't?

Him: Didn't?

Her: Didn't do it.

Him: This one or at all?

Her: I don't know.

(Car door opens. Puke sounds.)

Her: We have friends who've chosen not to. Colin and Sydney Wolf who live up North.

Growing up did you think you were gonna have kids? Like what was the story in your heads?

Colin: I didn't know. I didn't know. This is kind of depressing, but I was like, I read all the stats that were like, Indigenous men don't live past 25 all the time. So I was like, am I going to be alive to have kids? So like, that was like a realistic thing where I was like, huh. But then like later in my life, I was like, yeah, maybe I'd have kids. Like, but it kind of depends on the other person.

Her: They sit in their living room, cozy on the couch with a pennant that says "Among Wolves" above their heads. They chose that last name for themselves. They nestle together and I think about how two people really can be a family.

Colin: Um, Sydney's turn!

Sydney: Um, I wanted kids like there, there was never not a time that I can remember that I wanted kids. I always wanted kids. That's something like right from 11, 12, 13, years old, it was like, and then I'm going to get married, I'm going to have a kid. I never really like planned my wedding, but I really planned kids.

Um, but then once Colin and I kinda got to the part of our relationship it was a question of like, why would you want to have kids? What are the reasons? What are the pros? What are the cons? And that's kind of when we actually started to discuss why, and I really started to look into like, why I've always wanted a kid and it wasn't for a good reason.

Colin: And then the climate crisis was like [plane sound], and then also the pandemic, so...

Sydney: Yeah, there's a lot of factors up here specifically that really contribute to the decision.

Her: Talking to them in the North is like talking to the future. Canada is warming at double the speed of the rest of the world, and where they are in the North is warming at three times the speed. The changes are getting faster, a pendulum swinging between colder colds and hotter hots every season. They're seeing it happen.

Colin: And then there's the literal like if collapse happens between beginning of pregnancy and probably about 14, that's like, that will put a huge dent in our, and the kid's like survival rate, because like...

Sydney: Like right now. In Dawson, where we would potentially really, really enjoy living, in the winter they have cold snaps where like, without wind chill, literally like still, it gets to like minus 55. And so what happens if your kid breaks their arm and you have to now dig yourself out of this cabin, pray to God that your snowmobile starts. Like there's just so many things that can happen. And with the way that climate change is going, it's getting colder and colder up here,

which is fine. We're adults. We can cuddle and throw on a fire, but the risk of a child being able to survive that stuff is just so much harder.

Colin: Yeah. And like, again, if we have to become like roving nomads who combat other tribal groups for food in the next 10 years.

Sydney: A six year old's going to make it harder!

Colin: I'm just like, no.

Sydney: Also like last year we experienced a next level of flooding to the point where every weekend, all summer, everyone was volunteering to sandbag. A bunch of people lost their homes. And then we had unprecedented snow, which will again, lead to unprecedented flooding in the spring.

Colin: And the waters froze high. They froze at a high level. So we're going to start the floods at a high level.

Sydney: And like all of Whitehorse downtown runs alongside the river.

Colin: But there's only one bridge to the hospital in...

Sydney: And from us to get to the hospital. We would have to go through the flooding and then forest fires on top of everything else. We have one hospital up here and there's forest fires.

Colin: The report that said that Whitehorse could burn down in 30 minutes, if the conditions were ripe in the summer, it's just like right. 30 minutes.

Sydney: So there's just a lot of very tangible and also long-term issues with having a baby right now. And again, like maybe in five years, we'll have a really brilliant set of scientists, completely turn everything around and I will adopt.

Her: It could happen. Anything could happen. But until then, my friends in the future have decided not to.

Colin: Um, another side of it is like, what kind of a world would it grow up in? Like thinking of like how, like we were the last one of the last generations to like see climate cycles before they went really bonkers. Like that's like, right. Right. Like we're supposed to – I was reading a study about this, where like the millennials are the last generation who like, remember somewhat abundant wildlives because like, that's it, there's no more of those on the planet. So it's just like, right. So what are, what we now see is always going to be less than there was in the past, right? Which is a very strange thing. So if that continues, like, what are we, what future will the youth have?

There's something where like my mom gave me a better childhood than she had. I cannot give my, a child the same childhood that she gave me. So it's just like, it's just like, well, we're spiraling, we're not on our way towards that. Right. Like, um, so it's just a thing of like, I can see realistically that the life I'm offering, my kid would not be the same. 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.

Sydney: I want to be the helpful aunt. I want to be the cool, helpful art aunt that supports everyone else. I'll definitely take your kids for the weekend. I'll take them for an evening.

Colin: I'll give them an unpaid internship with the theater and put them to work.

Sydney: Yeah, I absolutely would love to help other people's children have full and enriched lives because I understand that it takes a village.

Colin: Cause yeah, if it does go really good and there is like a utopic environment and we all get pig hearts and live to 150, like yeah, I'll have a bébé.

Sydney: But unless that very specific set of situations arises, we're both pessimistic and optimistic simultaneously.

Colin: We're pessimistic and we're having a nice time and we don't want to wreck it.

Her: I don't want to wreck it. If we didn't have kids it would be...this. More of this. Coffee in bed with the sun streaming in. Uninterrupted conversations, uninterrupted thoughts. I hang out with my friends with kids now and they are fragmented, trying to be present for everyone at once.

"Sorry, I'm listening, sorry, sorry, wait what's in your mouth? Spit please."

We could go camping. Take up hobbies. Afford vacations. Afford a second bedroom. Maybe it would be beautiful, calm, peaceful.

I could make cinnamon buns on Sunday morning and everyone could come over. We could sit outside with coffee and the paper. Drink nice wine at dinner and face each other. I'd make stained glass windows, you'd play the guitar in the yard. I think I'm picturing Italy. I actually think this might be a scene from *Under the Tuscan Sun*? Whose life is that? What does it mean that when I picture childlessness I don't picture us?

(Sounds of cards shuffling)

Him: Trying to get this King, that's not gonna help in the end I think.

Her: Ok I'm gonna take that back.

Him: Oh shit I just covered it up, you waited until!

Her: You really think I have a lot more strategy than I do.

Him: I think that you have the same amount of strategy than I do if not more

Her: You look at my cards, I don't look at your cards.

Him: I am of the full belief that you're smarter than me and just being a pool shark.

Her: A pool shark for 5 years.

Him: We haven't been playing this game for 5 years.

Him: Ok what are we looking for here, that 2, that's good, that'll help, eh?

Her: What would you, what would you feel if we didn't have kids?

Him: Um, I dunno, I think I would feel a bit sad if we didn't. I dunno, I just imagined myself as a dad like, for so long, like, you know.

Her: How do you know what part of it is something you actually want and what part of it is just, this is just a thing that people do and it's the next expected step?

Him: Um, I feel like it, that was a question I had for myself for a really long time and uh, now my friends are having kids and uh, that question I feel like has been kind of answered.

Her: Yeah?

Him: I think when I think of, uh, when I think of uh, like being my dad's age, and if I didn't have kids and like this was, this was what we were still doing, like yeah, it'd be, it'd be fine but I think I'd feel quite empty.

Her: Yeah.

If we don't? It would be me you, the cat. More of this.
I like this. But do I like this enough?

(Card sounds)

Her: Yeah I'm stuck.

Him: Yeah me too.

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

Next time on Expectant:

Kim Nicholas: I don't think people will look at a graph and then, you know, make this like, fundamental life decision. But on the other hand, I think someone could look at this and say: "Oh, wow, that is a really big number. And I don't think I want it enough, or, you know, that doesn't fit with my priorities."