

Her: I wake up in the fetal position
Shooting pains drawing lines from my groin up to my ribs

My first thought: what if?

I don't feel terror. I don't feel relief.
Just nothing.
Blank curiosity as I ease out of bed to the bathroom.
I check - nothing there.

They say when you need to make a decision, flip a coin. Then if you're disappointed by the result, you have your answer. But I feel no resounding answer.

I sit on the toilet and fold myself over, putting my hands on the cold black and white tile floor.
I pee and stay like that for so long my spot in the bed is cold when I get back in.
I pull my knees into my chest and watch the traffic run along on the wall of our room.

Him: You good?

Her: Yeah, I'm good

The pain fades away after a few hours
Not sure if I sleep again

In the morning the pain is gone but by my second coffee I reluctantly agree with myself
I should talk to someone about this.
I script calling my doctor and wonder if I can get around mentioning any of this. Probably not.

I'm...pregnant. How do you strike the right tone?
I'm pregnant. Neutral
Oh, also, I'm pregnant. But doesn't open up a conversation.

I decide to do a remote thing with an on-call doctor who doesn't know me instead.
So far this conversation hasn't left my room and I'd like to keep it that way.

Doctor: Ok - stomach pains you said?

Her: Yeah

Doctor: Sharp, dull?

Her: Sharp

Doctor: Whereabouts?

Her: Uh, everywhere?

Doctor: For how long?

Her: Just last night

Doctor: And any chance you're pregnant?

Her: Uh, yeah. I am.

She looks up at me, wearing a perfect expression of neutral interest. Her mouth slightly open as if to ask: Congratulations, or options? Waiting for me to open the door. I don't.

Doctor: How long? Uh, 7 or 8 weeks.

Her: She turns back to the computer. Types.

Doctor: At this stage, pain like that could mean a lot of things... Gas, stress.

Her: Mmhm.

Doctor: But I'd like to order an ultrasound to make sure everything is alright.

Her: Fuck.

I knew this was a possibility but Google said the first one isn't usually for another few months. There's something about an ultrasound that makes it real, and I'm not ready to see what's in there.

And lucky me, they have an opening the next day.

I drag my feet so long I'm almost late to the appointment

Walking into the hospital I compulsively scan every woman's midsection without meaning to and immediately regret ever going to the doctor, ever telling anyone anything.

All this, probably just for gas.

I deeply consider no-showing as my feet walk me in and I fill out the forms.

Lying back,

I know I shouldn't have come

I can feel the position, the paper gown, the fluorescents, tick tick ticking off the trappings of this scene in the movie of my life

I regret. Everything.

The gel is predictably cold.

The technician predictably apologizes.

The pressure on my full bladder is more than I expected.

They say the ultrasound is loud in there, as loud as a subway pulling into the station.

(We hear a whoosh almost like a train, but abstract, becoming the whooshing of the ultrasound probing around. It's loud and close, moving around through the following.)

It sends sounds into the body, and the monitor records the echo, almost like echo location. Hot, crowded, a beam of sound searching. Like a searchlight chasing down whatever is in there.

I told myself I wouldn't look. But it's right there.

The screen is all dark except for a little white blur in the corner, the shape of a kidney bean. It looks like the first photos of the dark side of the moon. In the 50s, they took these grainy black and white images where you can just sort of make out these craters and white spots.

It was hard to make out anything specific, but having an image of it almost made it more mysterious. We'd been looking at the moon from one angle forever and suddenly there's this image of the whole half we'd been missing.

I think I know my body but now there's this thing getting a viewpoint on it I'll never have. All it knows is warm and dark and red like the inside of your eyelids in the sun.

I think back to what my mum might have seen at her ultrasounds when I was in there. The pure hope, the clean happiness. Just getting to feel sure that this is right and good.

At around 4 months in utero we've grown all the eggs we will produce. So the egg that made me lived in my grandmother. And this, this egg lived in my mum.

Her: Um, when you were growing up, did you know that you wanted to have kids?

Marjory: I didn't think about it very much. I have to be really honest about it, I just assumed. So I never was one of those people who said, oh, in this world, you know, with nuclear war almost a certainty that I just don't think I would have children. I just assumed I would, but I didn't know when. Solvency. I thought getting a real job seemed like a goal first. But then I, we got to a point where I thought...with David, he was quite insecure about it, just he thought it would be so much responsibility. But we did anyway.

Her: And you just thought...

Marjory: We could do this.

Her: We're in my parents bedroom sitting on their bed having this talk. It's a weird conversation to have sitting on the same bed I crawled into in the middle of the night until I was far too old.

I am absolutely not ready to tell her about the very real timeline we are on. I try to keep it theoretical. Her face reads curiosity verging on suspicion, but she doesn't say anything directly and neither do I.

Her: You mentioned nuclear war, was that something other people in your generation were talking about?

Marjory: Um, yes. It is a different thing though, when you think, okay, there might be a nuclear war and then we're all gone, like, like that. And while that's a horrific thought, I don't know if it's quite the same as saying I'm contemplating bringing a child into the world where I don't know what that future's going to look like, and it's not going to be like, I'll be gone, they'll be gone. Everybody will be gone together. It's this uncertain future. And you might not even be there. And I think one of the things about having a child regardless of the historical period is that you're vulnerable in a way that you never were before. Um, as an illustrative anecdote, there was a funny story about Alan and June and him saying about getting more good life jackets for the boat.

Her: Alan and June were my grandparents.

Marjory: June was going well, you know, we haven't had life jackets for us, and he went - well, we're old. So it was kind of like his sense was, well, it sort of doesn't matter because we're us and you know, that's that, but the children, whoa. And I think that is a kind of a human instinct to think that safeguarding the future for them is more important even than your own safety. And that's the thing you can't control. And so you worry about what your kids, what the world's going to be like for your kids when you're not there. And of course, that's, that's just a terrible worry. It's a terrible vulnerability. And it's, I think it's the human condition. Well, at least it has been in our, uh, individualistic, modern world.

This is an unprecedented time, there has never been anything like this in history. Um, so as a historian, I'm flailing, you know, so I don't think I have any words of wisdom from that point of view. Except that I suppose parenting is what everybody has always done, but it is also an act of hope. And I think that taking that away from what is human is really tragic. To, to not give people another generation to hope for.

Her: What would you think if you didn't get to have any grandchildren?

Marjory: I would be so sad. I would be very, very sad and it's not all about me, but I would be very sad. Yeah. I think it's a, well, it's a wonderful time of life. Just look at how Gill is, she's just...or Charlie, they're just so just excited, engaged with these little people and such, you know yeah. It's really lovely to watch. So yeah, I'd be very sad.

Her: Um, you said hope before, like in what way do you think that having kids right now is an act of hope?

Marjory: Um, well, okay. I tend to be a little over optimistic, but I keep thinking of the wonderful mothering I am seeing around me. I mean, I, I think the mothers that I've seen of your generation. I can't believe them. I think they're better than us. And I guess when I say an act of hope, I think that there will be these people who are able to meet the challenges that their generation throws at them. I guess my hope is that there will be, we will rise to the challenge that we will make big changes. And that there also will be some things that we don't know is possible right now that could save us. It's possible it won't happen. But I'm hopeful that there will be, it's not like sit around and wait for technology to, to come along. We have to make huge changes. But I still am hopeful that raising a resilient generation of smart kids that are curious will also accelerate the changes that we need to make. That are alive now. We had some of those children.

There could be children born that could come up with solutions for sucking carbon out of the atmosphere for dealing with the plagues that could perhaps consume, um, you know, humanity. But there are people discovering things all the time that nobody even imagined existed. And if you give up on the future generation, those people won't be born.

Her: What, like what do you think that I might be like if I had a kid?

Marjory: Um, Oh, I think you're going to be amazing. Yes. And you won't be perfect all the time. That's another thing, you cannot be guilty. You will lose your temper. You won't have as much patience as you would like to have. But you will play and that will be great. You will play with your kids. I think there's nothing you can do that's better than that, than really playing. Yeah. And you'll be stressed out and you'll try and be doing your job while the kids are doing what they're doing and they don't care because they do what they do, even if you're stressed out. So, gotta deal with it.

Her: You *will*, you are *going to be*. Hm.

What did you feel like parenting, having kids...what do you feel like it changed about you?

Marjory: Um, well, there is a kind of, grown-upness about it where you come to a point where you go, oh, I am that person for this little person. I'm the one, I'm the mum. Um, which is quite alarming. This is it, yeah. You're, you're worried in a way that you weren't worried before. You have fears in a way that you don't have fears when it's just you, um, fears about what could happen to that little person. One is frightened for oneself, but one is frightened for one's children in different way. Um, you know, you sort of think, oh yeah, I can stand having my feelings hurt. I can stand rejection. I can stand, but you can't stand your kid having those things happen to them. So that's, um, yeah, that's, that's part of it. It's really funny that one allows one self resilience, but one doesn't allow one's children resilience. So, you know, you hate somebody who hurts your children way more than you hate somebody who hurts you, it's weird.

But on the other hand, you care less about what other people think or, your job, or other things like that, you know, you sort of have a different sense of what's a priority, what's important. When you have a little person around that is seeing the world for the first time, you see it really anew, and that is super good. It is so fun. To see blades of grass and bugs. And just looking at the world, just from this, everything is new point of view. That's really exciting. Um, and watching a little intelligence unfold and seeing how a brain works is, so... you feel part of the natural world, you feel part of the eternity of humankind. Um, It's, it's, it's, it's a beginning, it's a, yeah renewal. Really, really wonderful.

Her: A renewal. Doesn't that sound beautiful?

To make a new intelligence fall in love with the world.

The first time you see a ladybug. A slug.

Watch buds appear on trees. See the seasons change our neighbourhood, the earthy mulch of wet fall leaves. Watch cherry blossoms snow down on you from my shoulders.

On our hands and knees we can marvel at the line of ants that have found their way into our kitchen.

Swim in bioluminescence and draw constellations with our feet.

Watch sunflowers follow the sun with their faces.

We could count rings on giant fallen trees and try to imagine what they've seen.

Watch a flock of birds turn perfectly in sync.

I'll show you all the magic I can think of.

Before it's gone.

Her: Um, so you think that having kids is the right choice?

Marjory: Yes, yes, yes, I do. For you.

Her: As the poet Maggie Smith writes: "*Any decent realtor, walking you through a real shithole, chirps about good bones: This place could be beautiful, right? You could make this place beautiful.*"

My mum, she's, well, she's biased.

Credits: 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 the finale of Expectant:

Lisa Cooke-Ravensburgen: I joke about it, but in a way it's actually true in a way it's like I'm trying to give them what they need so that they can die well. You know, so that they can get to the end of whatever their life on this earth is knowing that they knew themselves as best that they could, knowing that they loved as best as they could, that they made choices that were not just self-serving, but that they were connective and interconnected and interdependent.