

what might have been

Today all I can think about is what might have been. It's a Saturday, bitter cold and bright, harsh, splintering. We're doing normal Saturday things, and since we recently moved into our new house, "normal" includes unpacking the remaining boxes, assembling furniture, making endless Target and Ikea lists.

Today is the day that would have been my due date, had my pregnancy been a healthy one. Nine months ago, the world was so different. I was so different. The concept of pregnancy was so different to me, so innocent. Of course I knew women who had miscarried: my mother, my cousin, my friends. But like anything, when it happens to you it's like waking up to a conversation you've heard before and only now grasp, and you realize entirely anew what they were talking about, what they were trying to find the words to describe.

So that's today, the day of what might have been. Someday we might have another child. But we'll never have a child born on January 31, 2009. The baby I found out about on Memorial Day weekend, the happy secret I shared with Aaron on the phone, standing outside the Phoenix Street

Café, the baby I carried inside me to Fiji to visit Todd and Joe on the boat—that baby will never be. And it seems worth stopping for today, just for a moment.

For me, as well, the specifics of the miscarriage changed me from one kind of mother to another. It's a broad sisterhood of women who don't have easy conceptions and pregnancies, but to be honest, I liked being in the other group. It was so deeply moving to me that my body nurtured and nourished Henry, delivering him safely into the world, whole and healthy, and this miscarriage and its aftermath have forced me to ask some questions: Did my body fail me? Did I somehow fail it? We've had such a tenuous relationship in the past, my body and I; was this a breach of trust?

I went to a wedding six months after the miscarriage. The wedding was absolutely perfect, the first of my ten small group girls to get married, a sweet celebration on a hot Austin night. Christel was gorgeous, all eyelashes and happy tears, and we all danced together and took pictures and laughed. And then for a little while, Kristin, another one of the girls from my small group, left, walked to the front of the old house alone, stood on the sidewalk, listening to the music in the distance, heart heavy with what might have been.

Kristin does this at every wedding. She dances and laughs and hugs and smiles for pictures, and then, at one point or another, she slips away and lets a few tears fall for the maid of honor who will never stand at her own wedding someday. Kristin's sister Laurie ended her own life four years ago. They were stepsisters and best friends. And then when they were both twenty, Laurie chose to end her life in a heartbreaking, confusing tangle of hurt and accusation and broken friendships. I remember the first everything—the

what might have been

one-month mark, the first birthday after she was gone, the one-year mark.

Kristin, of course, remembers Laurie all the time, but the ache is never more acute than at weddings, because when Kristin gets married, the sister she dreamed about weddings with for years won't stand with her on that day. Weddings, more than anything else, bring her to what might have been.

And now Kristin and her fiancé, Sean, are getting married, and she's thinking about how to walk through the months of her engagement and the day of her wedding without her sister. The ache for her sister has deepened in the season before the wedding. Kristin decided she won't have a maid of honor, so that no one will stand in the place of Laurie's memory on the day that the two sisters had dreamed about for so long.

The night Sean proposed, Kristin started to cry in between phone calls to friends and family. Sean asked her to dance in the living room, surrounded by the flowers and candles he'd set up for the proposal, and as they danced, she realized the one phone call she still wanted to make was to her sister Laurie. Kristin felt both angry and sad in that moment, remembering Laurie's exuberant phone call to her just a few months before her death—"I'm engaged!" Kristin wanted so badly to make that same call to her sister and best friend that night, and it felt deeply unfair that Laurie wasn't there to pick up the phone.

If you've been marked by what might have been, you don't forget. You know the day, the years. You know when the baby would have been born. You know exactly what anniversary you'd be celebrating, if the wedding had happened. You know exactly how old she'd be right now, if she were still alive. You'll never forget the last time you saw

bittersweet

your child, or the last time *cancer* was a word about someone else's life, or the day that changed absolutely everything. It makes the calendar feel like a minefield, like you're constantly tiptoeing over explosions of grief until one day you hit one, shattered by what might have been.

On most days, for me, it's all right. We'll have another baby someday. I hope we do. But for today, for a minute, it's not all right. I understand that God is sovereign, that bodies are fragile and fallible. I understand that grief mellows over time, and that guarantees aren't part of human life, as much as we'd like them to be. But on this day, looking out at the harsh white sky of a Chicago winter, I'm crying just a little for what might have been.

I'll get up from here, wash my face and hands, peer in at Henry while he sleeps, a sweaty, unruly little boy, dreams of dragons and Buzz Lightyear flickering behind his eyelids. I'll have dinner in the city with my oldest friends tonight, toasting the first time in years we've lived in the same town. Life will keep moving, exactly as it should. No one might ever notice January 31, and what it means for me. But I'll always know.

I don't know what date it is for you—what broke apart on that day, what was lost, what memories are pinned forever to that day on that calendar. But I hope that, like Kristin, on that day you leave the dance floor and hold yourself open and tender to the memories for just a moment. As one who grieves today, I grieve with you, for whatever you've lost, too, for what might have been.