

The Reproductive Cycle

by Kassaz

A cheerleader, a goth, and a gamer girl walk into a bar. All three carry late-term pregnancies. The bartender glances over to them before saying his usual line. “Hello, ladies. I’m glad to have you back, but remember: no alcohol.”

“Yeah, yeah, you always tell us that, like, every single day. We’re just here for the food.” The cheerleader slowly sits on a stool, needing to place her right foot on one of the lower rungs and her hand on the counter before awkwardly turning to place her left foot, then pushing herself up to get her butt in place. She just barely rotated herself to face the bartender; her belly was almost striking the underside of the counter. “It’s so much better than the cafeteria’s.”

The bar was dark, very poorly lit by only a few incandescent lights that flickered occasionally, but they didn’t mind.

The goth said nothing, her sitting went much the same as the cheerleader’s, but she didn’t bother trying to turn herself, knowing she couldn’t; she rested her right elbow on the counter and would prop her head up with her hand until it started becoming uncomfortable. The gamer girl was too lazy even to attempt sitting on the stool, and instead wedged herself into the closest booth before speaking. “I don’t think he can help it, Samantha.”

“Well, whatever, Angela. I’ll have a pepperoni and anchovy pizza.” The cheerleader made one of her usual orders, which the bartender noted. The bartender’s legless torso slid along the mechanical rail behind the bar until it was in front of the goth, who pointed at the menu in her usual way, and afterwards the bartender did nothing but stare at Angela, blinking occasionally, while she thought of hers.

“I’ll have, uh, screw it, mongolian chicken tonight.” With all of their orders taken, the bartender set out three glasses of water and pretended to clean a glass with a cloth while the kitchen received the signals and went to work.

The cheerleader wore a baggy shirt and sweatpants; the goth a black T-shirt and short skirt, both straining against her; and the gamer girl a short top with matching shorts, both made from a stretchy material. All three wore slippers or sandals.

About a minute later, the cheerleader was bored, and decided to start an argument. “We’re not in China, Angela, you can order normal food, you know.” She laughed, but the gamer girl knew what she was doing, and a “bitch” was her only reply. About another minute later, the cheerleader was bored again, and started complaining to no one. “It’s so boring here. God, why can’t we have our cellphones?”

“It’s something to do with electromagnetic interference.” The goth spoke up, not bothering to look away from the utensils with which she was playing on the counter.

“It’s something to do with bullshit.” Before the cheerleader could start another argument, a ding let them know the food was ready. The bartender always grabbed all of the food through a narrow slit leading to the even darker kitchen. The first was an entire large pizza, gently set before the cheerleader.

The second was spaghetti with no meatballs, set before the goth. The third was the chicken, set next to the untouched glass of water, both well out of Angela's reach.

"Could one of you hand me my food?" Angela thought for a moment before adding "please" to the end of that sentence. The cheerleader laughed.

"C'mon, you can get it yourself. God, I'm glad I'm not as big as you." Samantha started eating, and Angela looked to the other girl. She sometimes helped, but this wasn't one of those times. It was hard to feel sympathy for a pregnant woman, when oneself is pregnant. Angela sighed and started sliding out of the booth; the sounds of her bare skin separating from the faux leather were very easy to hear in the very quiet environment. She couldn't help but think she needed to stop wearing elastic shorts, and couldn't help but remind herself that nothing else fit her. She couldn't remember the last time she'd buttoned a button.

She walked to the counter, but turned before reaching it so she could grab her food easily. She could just barely grab it head-on, but it wasn't worth trying. Then another issue reared its head as she set her food and drink down on the table: bending down to pick up her dropped fork. It had slid off the plate when she'd accidentally tilted it. She scowled as she set her left hand on the table, and grunted as she slowly squatted; she rotated in-place a little until she could grab the fork with her other hand. She took a deep breath before managing to rise. Finally, she sat back down and cleaned her fork with a napkin before using it.

The bartender continued to feign living.

They left the bar at the same time, after each had made a silent effort to finish her food at around the same time as the others. Outside of their private rooms, they preferred to move as a group throughout the facility.

Samantha spoke first. "I hate how dark everything is in here. It's creepy. What do you think, Hailey?" The goth was walking behind the other two women, per the usual.

"I don't mind it. They were nice to let us be the first in this maternity ward. It's supposed to be the most advanced in the world." Her voice was a little ways above a whisper, not that there was any noise to drown it out. Samantha continued talking.

"Sure, but, you know, that hardly matters if most of the place isn't finished yet." She turned away from Hailey and gestured to the locked doors on either side of them. It resembled a dying mall. "I can't wait to pop my little girl out and leave this dump."

"You really think you're only having one with how huge you are?" Angela smirked at her, and made certain Samantha saw before continuing. "I'm looking forward to showing my kids off to my parents. None of my siblings have had any yet."

"They can't be that happy, since you're not married." Samantha countered without much thought. She noticed Angela had stopped, and Hailey stopped when Samantha did.

"I wouldn't have children out of wedlock!" Angela almost phrased it as a question.

“I thought we got the offer to stay here because we were unwed mothers.” Hailey spoke up, to which Samantha yelled back with, “It’s not the fucking 1950s.”

“You know what? This is giving me a headache.” Angela grabbed her head. “I’m going back to my room.” She left one hand massaging her temple while the other went to her hip to help her stabilize. They watched her waddle away without saying a word. Soon enough, she was out of sight.

“That was weird.” Samantha spoke first, and then turned to Hailey. “At least I know you’re not being delusional about having a husband.”

Without anything to do, they followed Angela’s lead to their rooms, still talking along the way.

“So, uh, how’d you get knocked up?” Samantha saw little point in using sugary language with the goth.

“Oh, the normal way. My boyfriend was an office worker, and he bailed when I told him the good news.” Hailey again stopped walking when Samantha stopped.

“Really; you didn’t get knocked up at a concert? Your boyfriend wasn’t a musician? You’re not carrying some demon your cult summoned in there?” Samantha paused between each question, and Hailey gave a “no” to each one, giggling a little at the last idea. They continued walking.

“I just like the goth aesthetic. I don’t mind hanging it up for my little girl, though.” Hailey thought a little before she spoke again. “So, how about you?”

Samantha didn’t speak for a while. “Uh, I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Come on, that’s not fair. I answered your questions.” Hailey almost wanted to be annoyed, but her voice was still just above a whisper, and she didn’t really care beyond making conversation anyway.

“Well, I don’t remember.”

“What, you were at a party and got drunk or something?”

“No, well, maybe.” They passed underneath a skylight, but only moonlight shone through it. Samantha looked up while she thought about her words, and Hailey did the same. “I can’t remember what I was doing before I woke up here. The doctors told me something about a medical emergency that got me helicoptered over here.” She looked down at herself again. “I probably was at a party when I got knocked up, though.”

“Were they real doctors?”

That seemed like a weird question for Hailey to ask. “What do you mean?”

“Well, the doctors only talk to us now through the screens in our rooms, right, but now you’re telling me you actually saw them? Did they have legs, or were they like the bartender?”

“Uh, I’m pretty sure they were real.” Weeks ago, Samantha would’ve been annoyed by a question like that, but now she was more than a little uncertain.

“I guess they could’ve been really good robots, though.” She thought a bit more before adding, “Why aren’t they ever here in person, again? Do you know?”

“They told me it was part of the appeal of the facility when I came here.” Hailey started playing with her hair, and the other hand started smoothing out her shirt stretched over her middle. “They said it was so they could hire specialists from anywhere in the world, and if they can prove that we can mostly take care of ourselves, while the robots handle the rest, then they’ll be able to open up the facility to the public. I think that’s how they put it, anyway.”

“That sounds about right, I guess.” They continued their walk, now choosing to look at the occupied but sealed rooms flanking the hall. Samantha spoke up first once one caught her eye. “I wish that movie theatre would open already. I’m bored as hell.”

“I’d be happy just getting some new clothes.” Hailey spoke up. “It feels like the cleaning service shrunk mine a little.” Hailey’s bosom bounced with every step she took, straining against the black T-shirt that had once met her hips and now couldn’t cover her pregnancy; her nipples would’ve been visible, had the lighting been better.

“It’s a little hard to care about how I look with just the three of us, but I guess some new clothes would be nice.” Samantha stared off into a far corner for a moment. “I could give the guys behind the cameras a little show with some sexier outfit.”

“I don’t know. With what you’re wearing now, some guys would be turned on if you just took your slippers off.”

Samantha didn’t quite understand. “What, like a foot fetish thing?”

“No, no, I meant like “barefoot and pregnant” and everything. You’re already dressed like you don’t leave the house.” Once she understood, Samantha started laughing, and Hailey joined in but not as loudly.

“Oh, I’m glad I’m having a girl and not a boy.” Samantha took some time to run her hands over her bump and smile. “I won’t have to teach him to respect women, or whatever else men tell their sons.”

“Is it weird that we’re all having girls?” Hailey wondered aloud. “I’d kind of expect there to be a boy in one of us, wouldn’t you?”

“Maybe?” Now they were in front of the entrances to their rooms. It was a long hallway perpendicular to the main passage. Each room was numbered, and a key card controlled access. Samantha and Hailey started fishing for them, the one item they were required to carry on their persons. Samantha’s was in her pocket, while Hailey stored hers between her bosom and belly. “Anyway,” Samantha started, “good night, and let me know if you have any other weird questions tomorrow.”

Now Hailey was alone. She swiped her card and walked into her room. “Sure.”

This story was commissioned by HL.

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