

1. Recently I turned 35. It felt momentous and definitive: a culmination of sorts, a new Census bracket, a new vantage point.
2. The term is outdated but still widely used: "[geriatric pregnancy](#)," describing the supposedly higher medical and developmental risks a mother and baby experience after the threshold of age 35.
3. Growing older is a profound privilege; not everyone gets to be 35.
4. What I remember of them still: The feathers in her hair. The bonsai tree on his front step. The clean, sweet way he smelled. The press of his lips in the dark. The way she loved him. The way she loved him.
5. From ages 17 through 30, I worried about getting pregnant accidentally. My period each month came with an edge of relief, even when there was no chance beyond immaculate conception.
6. Right before my 31st birthday, I started bleeding and didn't stop. For weeks at a time I couldn't leave my apartment, couldn't sleep for more than a few hours at a stretch.

I spent six months like this, two surgeries and two aftermaths, thousands and thousands of dollars, piles of ruined sheets and towels and underwear.

7. I'm better now, although permanently anemic, and permanently mistrustful of the shaky clockwork of my body. No one could tell me why it happened, just how. No one can tell me that it won't happen again.

8. I've been with my partner for almost a decade. Before him – before the last handful of years with him, really – this was all hypothetical, far-off and amorphous. He is so solid and sure and unanxious; he makes the future feel like something that can be touched, can even perhaps be shaped.

9. I've always been afraid of the future, its boundless unknowability. I worry about how the choices I've made, consciously or otherwise, reverberate and compound and double back; I worry about not being able to choose at all.

10. I seek control where I can find it, synthetic and otherwise, to counterbalance my fear.

It's why I like yarn, and words, and code: materials that can be constrained by rules, organized into patterns, in which I (maybe paradoxically) find a kind of freedom.

It's why I'm prone to addiction, to compulsion, to picking away at myself when I'm the only thing in arm's reach.

11. We trade baby names back and forth. Some jokes, some serious, all kindling a wisp of something real for a beat before they're blown out again — *not yet*.

12. The year I turned 33, we decided to try to freeze embryos. My work would pay for it. It would be, we said, an insurance policy in the event we had trouble later, especially in light of what I'd just gone through.

It didn't mean a definitive *yes*, just an *in case*. Still: not nothing.

13. I did pay. Around two thousand dollars total, a far cry from the hundred-thousand-plus price tag the procedure can command out of pocket, but not nothing.

Mostly the money went toward medications.

14. I paid in other ways. Hours of phone calls, dozens of appointments, blood draws administered by kind nurses and indifferent ones. And injections, each day of each active cycle at a precise on-the-dot time, administered by me.

By the conclusion, again: six months, a half-year lease on my body.

15. The appointments were all early; they had to start before 9 a.m. This was so there was time for the lab to process any test results — blood draws, ultrasounds — so my daily cocktail of medications could be tweaked accordingly.

16. Starting at noon each day, I'd keep my phone volume at the highest setting so I wouldn't miss the nurses' calls with instructions.

17. Around 6:50 p.m., I'd lay out my vials and syringes, my gauze pads and my American Girl Doll-sized sharps disposal container.

At exactly 7 p.m., I'd give myself two or three shots in the lower abdomen. The last, with the on-the-nose name *Menopur*, always burned.

18. The shock of hormones made me tender and raw, like all my nerve endings were closer to the surface than usual. I had already been crying a lot that year; then, I cried even more.

19. The orthodox rigidity of the process felt at odds with its practically arcane degree of randomness.

I've never had access to more up-to-the-minute information about my own body, nor a more attentive team of doctors, nor a more finicky medical protocol, but even then nothing meant anything definitive.

20. My body for a while felt like a piece of machinery that at best would not cooperate and at worst was irreparably broken. I hadn't tended it, hadn't trained it, and now it was failing at the very thing it was built for.

I knew how melodramatic this was, how

violently opposed to everything I actually believed, but it was hard not to feel like I was coming up short on each guided tour of my underpopulated ovaries.

21. Fertility math is both ineffable and precipitous. The dosage calculus is meant to, among other things, stimulate growth of egg follicles, but provides no guarantees, no predictive precision.

A body could respond well to a medication one cycle and reject it the next. One promising bud could give way to many eggs or none.

22. After the eggs, if there are any, comes attrition. Only so many will be viable, which can become only so many fertilized embryos, which can become only so many stable frozen ones. Only so many of those might survive the eventual thaw and implantation.

23. Because of course this is all the pre-work, the table setting, not the main event. That's its own country altogether, with its own set of embodied fears.

My history means it will almost certainly be

difficult; there are many worlds in which it's not possible. But again, the math there is random, beyond brutality and kindness, and hope weighs about the same as dread.

24. The last day of a given cycle is unlike the others. Instead of the typical cocktail of two or three medications at the usual time, I would wait until exactly twelve hours before my scheduled retrieval to administer what is called the "trigger shot," which is a polite way to say that I jabbed myself in the ass with a 2-inch needle around 1:30 in the morning.

The first time, I was terrified; the last, I was bored of waiting up.

25. "Retrieval" always felt like the wrong term, too jaunty and erstwhile, too evocative of spelunking. Nobody liked when I called it a "harvest," but that seemed closer to the truth.

What it really is is a surgery, a relatively minor one. I came to enjoy the apple juice and graham crackers they'd give me when I groggily revived from the anesthesia.

26. Despite the frantic calculations, all you really need is one.

27. After everything, we have four embryos.

Four possibilities, four combinations, four potential outcomes in an industrial refrigerator somewhere under New Jersey.

28. I categorically don't believe that life begins at fertilization or whatever but I do believe that the die have in some sense already been cast, that there is a fundamental, existential expression of singularity in each of those four hard-won clumps of cells. Or, at least, in my relationship to them.

29. Right now I am not a mother. I want to live a life where I get to be one, but I oscillate over trading for the life I have now, with its movement and freedom and solitude.

I feel many days like I'm only just starting, like I've only just arrived, like it's much too early to give over to something beyond

myself. The clock, though, continues its relentless tick forward, and maybe I'm more expansive than I think.

30. And what about the world? What about it melting down, icing over, its fragile manmade systems collapsing under the weight of our shortsighted hubris?

What about the abject, banal cruelty of so many in power, who would sooner have me bleed out in an operating room than allow me or any child of mine a dignified life?

Who would come here unbidden? What right do I have to force them? What right do I have to decide they're better off staying away?

31. I think about my own mother, the best at love I've ever known. In my heart of hearts I worry that I don't have that same capacity, that same instinct, that I will never measure up. In my heart of hearts I want so badly to try.

32. I think about the astonishing, anchoring love I've built with my partner, and my friends, and the people I've taught and been

taught by, and this world that at its best is shared, is something we create among ourselves. I think about how I am not alone in this no matter how you run the numbers.

33. I think about the eight- or nine-year-olds I see at coffee shops with their dads, reading chapter books, pushing their plastic glasses up the bridges of their noses.

I think about seeing the world again at ground level.

I think about what we could make together. I think about who we could be.

34. Above all else I don't want to extrude a person into the shape of my own image, my own desires, my own strictures. I want to relinquish control, or at least I want to want it. I want to learn how to square that with a lifetime of anxiety, of pre-planning and pre-feeling and pre-fretting that's so far amounted to nothing but wasted energy.

35. I kept thinking I'd somehow be better by now, more fully formed. I think the jig is up.

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This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. There are five pairs of horizontal lines, each pair consisting of two parallel lines. A single vertical line runs down the center of the page, acting as a margin. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page.