

## Chapter 3



Jenni wakes, feeling the all too familiar cramping in her lower abdomen. She lies there in the darkness, trying to ignore the feeling and what it means. But then she notices the moist stickiness between her thighs.

She quietly rolls out of bed, wraps her silk dressing gown around herself, and heads to the bathroom. Standing in front of the mirror, she opens the dressing gown and sees the smear of blood between her thighs. She takes a clean washcloth from the cabinet and places it under the running tap, feeling the heat of the water on the towel and forming in her eyes. Then she wipes her inner thighs with the washcloth. Then retrieves a tampon from the cupboard.

Now clean and sorted, she sits on the side of the bathtub with her robe still open. *Is this going to happen?* She gazes at the rolls of flesh at her stomach reflected in the mirror. *Can this body hold a pregnancy?* Or is it wrong in ways she never before imagined? She wipes away the tear that has escaped down her cheek, turns out the light and heads back to bed.

Yet lying there, she feels restless. She can't take her attention off the cramping and the thoughts of what it means or may mean.

She again rolls out of bed, but this time retrieves yesterday's clothes hanging on the back of the bedroom door. She dresses in her studio and places headphones in her ears. Then she sits to begin her work. She focuses on the music and the fine detail of this filigree piece to distract herself from the whirling thoughts in her mind. It does work somewhat.

She is in her flow. In the flow, Jenni can escape the thoughts trying to bubble up—thoughts about whether her body is good enough. She has come a long way to accepting her body. She feels so much sensuality and comfort in her body. Yet, the thought that her body is not good enough still arises in moments like this. She knows it isn't necessarily true, but it is so ingrained—a story she and society have told her for so long. It is a story that is hard to release. But maybe there is some truth to it— perhaps she is too old or too fat to bear children? It is a thought she doesn't want to face but now knows she has to.

Jenni focuses on the fine strips of olive-green paper that she winds up to create fern fronds. She is so focused that when, some hours later, she feels a gentle tap on her shoulder, she jumps.

'Jenni...?' Barry leans down to kiss the space between her neck and shoulder. 'How long have you been up?' he says in a groggy, half-awake, half-asleep voice.

'Maybe... a few hours,' Jenni shrugs.

'Is... is everything okay?'

She leans her head onto his stomach and closes her eyes, feeling the warmth behind her eyelids.

He strokes her hair against the side of her face, and she can no longer hold back the tears. 'I... I got my period, Baz,' she says so softly that he can barely hear her.

'Oh,' he says, swallowing hard. 'Well, we'll keep trying. We can monitor your ovulation better. We can see our doctor. We'll do what it takes, babe.' He gently squeezes her shoulders.

She is comforted by the number of times Barry uses the word ‘we’. Yet, she can’t help but feel that this is a ‘me’ problem. She bites her lower lip, then says, ‘Yes, I’ll make an appointment with the doctor. I’ll... we’ll start to figure this out.’

‘Sure thing,’ Barry rubs her shoulders. ‘Wanta come back to bed and snuggle?’

Jenni shrugs, not motioning to move.

‘No matter what, we’ve always got snuggling,’ Barry says, reaching down to take her hand. He pulls her up off the swivel work stool. ‘Come on, babe.’

In bed, Jenni snuggles into Barry, resting her head on his shoulder. He soon drifts off to sleep. However, she lies there listening to his every breath—in and out, in and out. *How can he be so peaceful? How can he not be worrying like shit right now?* Maybe it is her problem after all.



Half an hour later, Jenni still hasn’t managed to fall asleep. She’s been lying there imagining consulting her doctor and having her worst fear confirmed; it’s her weight that is the problem.

Before the sun comes up, she again slides out of bed. This time, she makes her way to the couch to consult Dr Google. She searches overweight and fertility.

She reads sites that warn of the effects of obesity on ovulation and hormone balance, and how obesity increases risks during pregnancy, such as gestational diabetes, preeclampsia and... miscarriage. She knows she can’t go down the road of dieting again—it had never worked and only did more to cause her eating to spiral out of control. However, as she reads further, she recognises that maybe she could tweak her diet without an emphasis on weight loss. She could eat for improved fertility and

hormone balance. She reads up on diets for fertility and begins to make notes on the back of an envelope. She also notes how stress can affect fertility and resolves to do yoga at home in addition to attending classes at the studio.

By the time Barry staggers into the living room, Jenni feels more empowered—she has a plan.

‘Morning, babe,’ he croaks.

‘Morning,’ she says in a more cheerful voice than either of them expected.

‘Coffee?’ he says as he fills the kettle.

‘Nope, not for me,’ she replies.

‘Really?’

‘Yes, really,’ she says. ‘Barry, I’ve been researching fertility this morning. I’ve realised that I need to make some changes to increase our chances of getting pregnant.’

‘Oh, okay. So... no more coffee?’

‘Nope. No more coffee. No more alcohol. No more...’ She thinks a moment recalling what she’s read before continuing, ‘We’ll have to forgo soft drinks, processed meat, fried foods and sweets. None until we’ve got me good and pregnant.’

‘Hmm. But we don’t eat many of those things anyway.’ He sits beside her on the couch. ‘Are you sure it isn’t too restrictive?’

‘It’s not a ‘diet’ diet. I’m just going to tweak some things to increase ovulation and balance my hormones.’

‘Do you want to see your GP?’

‘I will.’ She looks him directly in the eyes. ‘But I want to try modifying my diet first. And monitoring my cycles better before I go in.’

Barry nods slowly.

‘That way,’ she continues, ‘I’ve got more information to show the doctor. And I can really show that we’ve done everything we can.’

‘You sure?’

‘Yes.’ She laughs lightly. ‘I’m sure.’ She reaches for his hand. ‘I’m going to make an appointment with the naturopath Becca mentioned. So that I can tweak my diet for the best chance of pregnancy—it will help to know this stuff, anyway.’

‘A naturopath?’ He raises his eyebrows. ‘You sure it’s not one of Becca’s crazy diet fads?’ His eyes widen.

‘No, not at all. Reading about all this online, it makes sense. I need to know what I should be eating. What supplements I should be taking. Any other lifestyle changes I can make to help us get pregnant. I want to get as healthy as I can. To have the best chance of getting pregnant and having a healthy baby.’

‘Sounds good.’ Barry squeezes her hand. ‘I love you.’

‘You too.’ She absolutely loves him and doesn’t want to do anything to let him down. ‘This is not like some fad diet, Barry. This is for us—for our baby.’

‘I know. I’m so proud of you, Jen. You’re going to make an incredible mother.’

‘I hope so.’

‘I know so.’ He leans in to kiss her forehead. ‘So, what can I make you to drink?’ He stands and makes his way to the kitchen. ‘What herbal teas do we have?’ He opens the cupboard. ‘Peppermint? Relaxation tea...? Ginger...?’

‘Any caffeine-free tea will do,’ she assures him. ‘I’ll get some raspberry leaf tea in my lunch break today and have that from now on.’

‘I don’t know... it seems a bit unfair, though. I’m going to enjoy this deep aromatic coffee while you sip some wishy-washy hippie tea. Do you want me to join you in this deprivation?’ he offers in a flat voice.

‘It’s not necessary, babe. You enjoy your coffee for both of us.’

‘Don’t mind if I do,’ he says with a slow smile.

Jenni laughs. However, she feels butterflies in her stomach—a mixture of joy and fear.

She watches Barry meticulously make his coffee and pour hot water over her teabag. *I'm not going to let you down*, she thinks. Although the nagging thought of whether her body is broken and will let them both down lingers. She pushes the thought aside. She's going to do whatever it takes—no matter the hippie juice required.