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Oscar, baby

A rush-hour race to a fertility clinic almost ends in disaster.

By Dani Klein Modisett

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February 24, 2007

YOU DON'T APPRECIATE how easily sperm travels through a vagina until you try to drive it across Los Angeles during Oscar week.

My husband, Todd, and I have a 3-year-old named Gabriel, whom I love more than I ever thought I would. I have an addict's mind, so as soon as I had him, I knew I would need another. However, I am "a certain age," so we enlisted some state-of-the-art fertility boosters. There was only one day a month that the insemination procedure might possibly (but probably would not) work. Which is how I end up driving westbound in rush-hour traffic with a cup of warm sperm in a brown paper bag.

My Beverly Hills gynecologist tells me to deliver the specimen for prepping within an hour. It is 7:54 a.m. when I pull out of our driveway in Atwater Village, later than I intended, but if there's one thing I've learned, it's you can't rush a man with a specimen cup in his hand.

Half a mile of Hollywood Boulevard is blocked for the construction of a celebrity bridge so the nominees can cross the street without soiling their gowns. It's a fantastic way to ramp up anticipation of the Oscars because it screws up traffic for a 40-mile radius around the Kodak Theatre. I panic.

"You're smart," Todd tells me over the cellphone. "You just need to figure out how to circumvent the traffic."

"I'm smart? Smart is having your babies at a normal age and not waiting until you've done every other thing with your life twice and then waking up and saying, 'Gee, maybe I should have some babies!'" I hang up, inching past El Capitan. I turn south on La Brea then onto Sunset and call him back.

"Now I'm landlocked in front of the Rock 'n' Roll Ralphs and it's 8:40 a.m. That's *not good*, Todd."

"Can you take a deep breath, honey?"

I do. As I'm exhaling, I see one of those illuminated traffic signs ahead flashing "ROAD CLOSED FOR EVENT." Someone is installing a 20-foot V-shaped hedge for the Vanity Fair party. Melrose is no better.

At 8:52 a.m., I start to cry.

"I didn't make the Oscars part of my infertility protocol," I sob to Todd on the phone. "It's not going to work. It's hopeless."

9:01 a.m. I flip the steering wheel hard to the left and tear down a side street. Dead end. I make a very angry three-point turn.

The phone rings.

"None of these damned roads go anywhere!" I scream into it.

"OK," the female voice says. My agent.

"Sorry," I say. "I'm working on a character who is totally out of control."

"Can you be at Bundy and Olympic in an hour in something that looks like a chicken suit? Just suggest it, you know maybe a yellow shirt and don't comb your hair...."

"No. I can't. I can't be a chicken in an hour. I'm going to be on a metal table with my legs spread."

"Is that the character talking?"

9:08 a.m.

When I finally turn onto Burton Way, I feel like Dorothy approaching the Emerald City. Until I see flashing lights and hear helicopters. There is a "police action" just outside my doctor's office.

I park away from the chaos, sprint through the police line directly into the office lab where a nurse is standing, casually stirring sugar into her coffee.

"He gave it to me an hour and 15 minutes ago. Am I too late?"

She puts down her stirrer and retrieves a small sperm-sorting appliance out of an overhead cabinet.

"You're not too late," she says, languorously plugging in the machine. "This will take about an hour."

We are in completely different movies. I'm all action-adventure; she's Bergman.

"But it took me over an hour to get it here. It's OK?" My nerves are frayed from the combination of fertility drugs and Oscar traffic.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, we just tell people that."

Once in the room where the insemination will happen, I don the paper skirt. I've brought some candles too, labeled "Welcome New Life." I put them on the counter next to a tube of K-Y jelly and light them. I turn off the lights and hop up on the examining table. The room looks almost pretty.

"Uh, what's going on here?" Dr. Lin asks, entering after a quick knock.

It's his day off and he's dressed like a J. Crew model. Looking at him from between my legs, in candlelight, with his hooded sweatshirt, for a second I feel as if I'm back in my college dorm.

"I thought I'd give the room a little atmosphere."

Dr. Lin exits as soon as he puts down the syringe. I have to lie on the table for 20 minutes. I notice the People magazine I had been thumbing through and think of all the Oscar nominees anxious about their fate, which makes me think about how anxious I am about mine. Wadding up my paper skirt and pulling on my underwear, I could not be less glamorous. My life is worlds apart from those red carpets and gold statuettes. And yet, wanting something very badly, but having no control over getting it — that is a feeling I understand.