

Autumn Colours

Our third child, another girl, was born on 30 September.

We knew early she would be frail so we had prepared.

Her sisters Spring (aged twelve) and Summer (aged six) were excited.

Our fears for Autumn were unfounded. The tests showed she did not have *spina bifida*. The hospital was apologetic and claimed a mix up at the lab.

Roger and I felt elated and guilty in equal measure.

'Dee (Delilah) honey, we must try to put this worry behind us and move on.'

'Yeah, I know but, you know.'

'Guilt?'

'Yeah, we almost . . .'

'I know but we did the right thing.'

'But Roger, what if we had aborted her as they advised. How could we have lived with ourselves?'

'Honey, think it through. They would have kept us in the dark.'

'Yeah, but what about the mix-up couple? How will they manage?'

'Yes, I know. Maybe there is some way we could help them?'

'The hospital would never reveal their identity, would they?'

'Let me think about it, OK? Maybe there is another way.'

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A few weeks passed.

Autumn was thriving.

April and Summer were perfect with her.

Autumn Colours

Both sets of grandparents and a few others were gathered at our place in Miami for Thanksgiving.

We had a short Humanist ceremony of Blessing and Dedication. My older sister Amy (Amelia) and her husband Jerome were her 'guardian parents'. They had tried for years to have kids but had given up, or so we thought.

When the others left, Amy stayed on for a few extra days, just the three of us.

We sat in the shade, on the deck.

Amelia opened up to me.

'Dee, did Mum tell you I lost another baby? It had *spina bifida*. Real bad. She had to be let go. She would have had no life worth living.'

'Oh Amy, how horrible for you.'

'It's OK now Dee, I'm more or less over it.'

'Are you sure you're OK? I mean is everything inside OK?'

'Yes. But I have a big ask to make. My Gynae guy made a suggestion. Look, I need to ask. Would you be willing to donate a few of your eggs to allow me to try one last time?'

'*In vitro*?'

'Yes, like Carla Stronner. Her sister did it for her and Oscar and Ophelia are perfect.'

'They were *in vitro*? No one said.'

'Well Dee, would you, *please*?'

'OK, I'll discuss it with Roger as soon as I get back to Boston.'

'Dee, there's something else I need to tell you?'

'Okay, shoot.'

'My Gynae guy says it would be optimal if Roger donated sperm for the *in vitro*. He says the latest tests on Jerome's bloods and semen show traces of abnormalities.'

'Oh no. Poor guy. Amy, I should have asked. Is Jerome okay with us discussing this *in vitro* issue?'

Autumn Colours

'I haven't raised it with him. It only came up a few weeks ago. I thought I'd sound you and Roger out first. It came up before, years back and Jerome was a bit flaky about it all. It's a guy thing, I suppose. Virility and so on.'

'OK. I'll get back to you soon as. Time for Autumn's feed and nappy change.'

'I'll go have a swim. Now I'm forty-two, I gotta work harder at keeping fit.'

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Two weeks later Roger and I attended the Clinic. I was at the crucial point in my cycle when my eggs were harvested.

Roger was in a private waiting room, ready to leave when I returned to join him. The whole business took less than an hour.

In the car going home he said:

'Twenty-five thousand dollars, Dee. I don't mind the money but what bugs me is Jerome is not in the loop.'

'I totally agree but Amy was dead against telling him.'

'Well, I just hope there are no hitches.'

'Roger, I been thinking we should stop at three kids.'

'Dee honey, I'm real glad you raised it first. When we were waiting for Autumn I wanted to ask how you felt about giving up at three. Don't worry, I'll have the snip. Easier and simple all round, agreed?'

'Thanks Roger, you're a really nice man. I just hated those guys fiddling inside me, it was horrible.'

'Yes, we've been blessed with three beautiful children. Enough, eh?'

'Yeah, we are so, so fortunate.'

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At next Thanksgiving we gathered at our Miami place.

Autumn Colours

This time it was for a blessing for Abbie (Abigail) and it was our turn to be 'guardian parents'.

Amy was radiant. In private she told me Jerome had not stopped grinning since Abbie arrived.

Four girls all with ash blond hair, all with sky blue eyes and the same honeyed Mediterranean tan skin from Roger's Sicilian heritage.

There was no trace of Jerome's' red hair, freckles or his Irish green eyes.

Our mother spotted the likeness but kept stumm.