

Paternity Ward

by

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Setting

A waiting room in a hospital.

Time

Present-ish.

Cast

COLLEEN - Well-dressed woman, in her 20s-30s.

TODD - Working-class man, in his 20s-30s.

ORDERLY - Big man in surgical scrubs, in his 20s-30s.

(COLLEEN paces back and forth past two chairs, a tissue in her hand, regularly dabbing her nose. She looks up as she hears a commotion outside the room. TODD is pushed into the room by a burly ORDERLY. The ORDERLY stands with his arms folded, blocking the exit.)

TODD

Let me out of here!

ORDERLY

No.

TODD

You stupid son of a bitch! My wife's having a kid right now! I'm going back up there!

ORDERLY

No, you're not. The doctor said to keep you down here, I'm keeping you down here.

TODD

I passed out once! Once damn it! I'm okay now! What's my wife gonna think if I'm not there?

ORDERLY

Buddy, just sit down and relax. Talk to the nice lady. She's having a kid too.

TODD

Har-dee-fucking-har-har. You're a riot, you know that?

ORDERLY

So they tell me. If it makes you feel any better, they kicked her off the floor too.

COLLEEN

Because I have a little bit of a cold! Whose policy is that? You think that's fair?

ORDERLY

Lady, we gave you a surgical mask and you filled it with snot in two minutes.

COLLEEN

Then maybe you need more absorbent surgical masks! Have you ever thought of that? If you did, then maybe I'd be up there where I belong!

ORDERLY

Jesus Christ. Settle down, both of you. Honest to God, they need to put a bowl of Quaaludes in here.

TODD

So you're having a kid? You're doing a great job of being pregnant, lady. I can hardly even tell.

COLLEEN

I'm not pregnant. My partner, Heidi, she's having the baby.

TODD

Your partner Heidi? What are you, some kind of dyke?

COLLEEN

Yes, actually. What are you, some kind of redneck?

TODD

Wait a second. You and another woman are having a baby? That's legal?

ORDERLY

Hey, Neanderthal man. I changed my mind. Don't talk to the lady. Just shut up and I'll let you know when you're a dad.

TODD

I can talk if I want to! What are you, some kind of Gestapo agent? I can say whatever the fuck I want! This is America, buddy! America!

COLLEEN

Yeah, it's America! Which means it's legal for two women to have a child.

TODD

Now how does that work exactly? Last I knew, you needed a man to have a kid. What do you do, check into some sleazy motel before they change the sheets and roll around until you get lucky?

ORDERLY

Buddy, I'm telling you, shut up.

COLLEEN

It's called artificial insemination. There are clinics, donors, and it takes a lot of time, a lot of thought.

TODD

I bet. They got a drive-thru window? You could get knocked up and pick up some fries while you're at it.

COLLEEN

Why do you have a problem with two people who love one another having a child?

TODD

Oh, I don't know. Because it's wrong? I mean, if you had a cat that gave birth to a bunch of puppies, wouldn't you think there was a problem there? It's not natural.

ORDERLY

I swear to God, buddy. I've been on duty for sixteen hours straight. Unless you shut up, hospital regulations do allow me to clock your sorry ass.

TODD

Hey, go play with some used needles or something.

COLLEEN

Is there another waiting room? Like for people with an IQ over 20?

TODD

Listen, I watch TV, right? I see all this stuff about families and how you got your two moms and half-brothers and stepdads, half-step-uncles and all that crap. And they're always telling you that they're all the same, you know, that a family's a family. And it's just bullshit.

COLLEEN

Why?

TODD

A kid should have a mom and a dad. One mom. One dad. The end.

COLLEEN

You're right.

TODD

What? What did you say?

COLLEEN

You're right. Ideally, kids should have one mom and one dad. But it's not an ideal world. People leave, people get divorced, or die. People are gay. People think they're straight, then figure out that they're gay. I have thought longer and harder about this than anything else in my life. What will my kid have to put up with, having two moms? What will our parents say? What will our friends say? Jesus, what if my kid meets someone like you?

TODD

What about your kid not having a father? Have you ever thought about that? What if you have a boy, for chrissakes?

COLLEEN

It is a boy.

TODD

Oh my God.

COLLEEN

You don't think that worries me? Terrifies me? Maybe you're right. Maybe I can't handle it. I don't know. But I've been studying up.

TODD

Studying up? On what?

COLLEEN

Guy stuff. Baseball. Football. The Three Stooges. I've got to be able to give some masculine input.

TODD

You've been studying up on The Three Stooges? Nothing personal lady, but you are completely out to fucking lunch.

COLLEEN

It's not like I have a choice, do I? I'm doing the best I can! But you're a man! You tell me. What did your dad teach you? What did he pass on?

TODD

My dad? My dad split when I was three.

COLLEEN

So, about the time you became verbal.

TODD

Fuck you.

COLLEEN

Do you think it affected you, not having a father?

TODD

How the hell should I know?

(moves towards the ORDERLY)

Let me out of here! You don't understand what's going on, man! I have to get up there!

ORDERLY

You're gonna get up there. In half an hour. Now cool it.

TODD

She's expecting me to be there! She needs me!

ORDERLY

Yeah? I need you too. I can't imagine life without you.

COLLEEN

Are you worried about your wife, is that it?

ORDERLY

Whoa, hold it right there. Despite what he might tell you, Don Juan here doesn't exactly have a wife.

TODD

Hey, mind your own, all right?

COLLEEN

You're not married?

TODD

We're getting to it! Christ, you don't want to get married sticking out to here, do you?

COLLEEN

Why did you decide to have a child before you got married?

TODD

Lady, I got news for you. In the heterosexual world, there are some things you don't exactly decide on. Sometimes, you slip one past the goalie.

COLLEEN

Wow. So everything I'm talking about means nothing to you. The planning, the worrying, the laying awake at night. You didn't do any of that. You just slipped one past the goalie. Way to go. That's really responsible.

TODD

I'm responsible.

COLLEEN

You're telling me that I shouldn't have a child, but at least I made the choice to have one.

TODD

Hey, I made a choice too.

COLLEEN

What choice? What beer to drink before you got your girlfriend pregnant?

ORDERLY

I think he's more of a malt liquor man, myself.

TODD

Listen, scrub-boy, I can't kick her ass because she's a broad. But I don't have to take that shit from you.

ORDERLY

Buddy, I'd pull you apart like a chicken dinner.

TODD

You think so? Then come on! Make your move, hotshot! Make your--

(he turns to COLLEEN)

Hey, am I right about that? The kicking your ass thing?

COLLEEN

What are you talking about?

TODD

Well, a regular broad, you're not supposed to. But a dyke, I don't know. You might be offended if I didn't.

COLLEEN

Great, I'm stuck in here with a politically correct redneck.

ORDERLY

Will both of you just please relax? I know you're on edge, I know you want to be with your loved ones, but lady, you're a walking Petri dish, and macho man here passes out at the sight of a needle. That means you're both liabilities waiting to happen. You're stuck here, and that's that. I'm sorry.

TODD

Like hell.

ORDERLY

Mister, you're gonna be a father in a few minutes. Now would be a really good time to grow up.

TODD

Listen to you. The elitist scumbag speaks.

ORDERLY

C'mon man, I'm an orderly. Your obstetrician is the elitist scumbag.

TODD

And you're wrong, both of you. We did make a choice about having a kid...after we found out.

COLLEEN

You mean abortion. That's your choice. You and your girlfriend decided to not get an abortion. This is amazing. Where do you get off, preaching to me?

TODD

I wasn't preaching.

COLLEEN

Yes, you were! You're telling me that I shouldn't have a child! You need to take a look in the mirror! You're the one bringing an unwanted child into the world.

TODD

He's not unwanted! Just...unexpected. And you, okay, you did all your worrying, all your planning, all your laying awake before there was any kid on the way. Well, what do you think I've been doing since I found out Kristen was pregnant? The same things. The exact same things.

COLLEEN

You know, when I was agonizing about all this, whether or not Heidi and I should have a child, it suddenly occurred to me that there are a lot of people in this world who shouldn't have children at all. The women, they think they've done something clever because they lay on their back with their legs in the air. The men, they just blast away and then move on to the next town. It's pathetic, all the kids that wind up being raised by one parent. You know what I think? People should have to have a license to own and operate fully functional reproductive systems.

ORDERLY

You got that right.

TODD

Hey, listen lady, at least my kid will have a father.

COLLEEN

Sure he will. For a couple of weeks. Or months. Or until you head out with a six-pack and another girlfriend. Then you'll probably skip town, just like your dad. Like father, like son. I guess he did pass something down to you after all.

TODD

That's not true! You don't know me! I will be there! I will always be there!

COLLEEN

You're not there now, are you?

(Like a knife through TODD. He tries to get past the ORDERLY again.)

TODD

You gotta let me up there! She's having one of those Caesarean things. What are they doing to her?

ORDERLY

Trust me, you don't want to know.

COLLEEN

Your girlfriend's having a Caesarean? So is Heidi.

TODD

They're cutting her up, aren't they?

COLLEEN

It's a small incision--

TODD

I even think about what they're doing to her up there, I feel sick. The guys at work, I know they'd think I was real pussy and everything, but I just can't stand seeing her hurt.

COLLEEN

Why is it being a pussy to care about someone you love?

TODD

It just is! Son of a bitch! I can't do anything!

(TODD sits down, almost in tears.)

COLLEEN

Hey, she's going to be okay. It's a safe procedure--

ORDERLY

They do them all the time. She'll be fine. Her and the baby.

TODD

Right now, my whole world is up in that room. What am I doing down here? I'm already gone. I'm already not there.

ORDERLY

You mean, like your father wasn't there? Is that what you're killing yourself about?

COLLEEN

You'll be there if you want to be. Right now, you're just waiting. Like me. We're waiting, that's all.

TODD

Yeah, but you're better than me, aren't you? Everyone expects you to stay. What do they expect of me? It's like you said, one six-pack and I'm gone, right?

COLLEEN

And like you said, if I think I can teach my kid football, I'm out to lunch.

ORDERLY

"Out to fucking lunch" I think was the exact quote.

COLLEEN

Thanks for the clarification.

TODD

I don't know. Maybe you can. If you really want to.

COLLEEN

And maybe you'll be there. If you really want to.

TODD

Yeah. Maybe...

COLLEEN

Listen, I'm sorry about what I said about you not being there. I've just been wound so tight, and you really got me going with all the dyke this and dyke that stuff. But I had no business saying that.

TODD

No, it was me. It's my fault. I don't know what's wrong with me. No, I know what's wrong with me, I'm an idiot, that's what's wrong with me. I'm sorry. I'm just like you, I've been a basket-case all day. I mean, we're both having a kid. Right now. Jesus. Can you believe that? We're gonna have a new person living with us.

COLLEEN

That room's been empty so long.

TODD

And we've decorated it like three times.

COLLEEN

Four times.

TODD

Just waiting for our beautiful baby--

TODD AND COLLEEN

Boy.

ORDERLY

Well, what do you know? You two might be human after all.

COLLEEN

(checking her watch)

Can I get out of here now? Heidi is due out of surgery in a couple of minutes.

ORDERLY

(checking his watch)

Yeah, okay.

COLLEEN

Good luck.

(COLLEEN extends her hand to TODD.
They shake hands a little awkwardly.)

Yeah. You too. TODD
(COLLEEN moves to leave, then turns.)

What's your name? COLLEEN

Todd. TODD

Colleen. COLLEEN

Nice to meet you, Colleen. Really. TODD

Same here. COLLEEN
(she takes a few steps, then
turns)
Say Todd...you want to come see my son?

(TODD looks at the ORDERLY, who stands
aside.)

Yeah. Yeah, I do. TODD
(They exit together, the ORDERLY
exiting after them.)

THE END.