

# Kinesiology

*by billy robinson*

I tell my doc I'm special, 1 in 1,000,000 special: unhitched, pushing 44, and knocked up. "Call Guinness," I joke, and fake jab his right arm. He puts his two hands over mine, smiles gently, like a father.

This is my third go-around, fourth, if you count AJ. We were 17, hopped up on love when he rode me out to Birch Grove Park and yanked my pants down. When I showed him the blue strip, he saw his future and punched the wall. I thought an abortion would save us, only he started dating Cindy Sawyer. She gave me dirty slut-filled eyes in the hall, like it was my fault his sperm broke through.

Ten years later came JackO. He had dark hair, the color of an Oreo. He was a boxer, ran bets on the side, while I was waitressing nights at the Coral and getting on with a certificate in court stenography. He came in every one of my shifts for two months straight, winking and patting his knees occasionally. He said he was clairvoyant. Knew we'd hook up and I'd carry around his baby batter. He was spot on about the baby part, except he missed the mark that I'd be sprawled out on the bathroom floor dry heaving, waiting to vomit until my water broke with a big gush and a "bloody show."

Then came Graham. We eloped to Niagara Falls, but for most of the eight months we were out of sync, so getting pregnant was just the kicker. Four weeks after he left, I ended up staring at a monitor, at my uterus sac and the gray fuzzy smudge, the fetus's tiny unbeating heart.

Wick, the guy who impregnated me this time, split two months ago. The thing is, he's already got three children. "You should've been on the pill," he argued, to which I replied, "I'm forty-fucking-three."

\* \* \*

Two days after the doctor's, I'm sick as a dog. But I want out of my apartment, head to a place where there's a crowd.

"Let's go to the mall," Rudy suggests. On the way, he keeps turning his head toward me, like we're watching a movie he's already seen and wants to gauge my every reaction.

"Rudy, stop the suicide watch."

Rudy is 24. We ran into each other three months ago at *Friendly's*, where he's been a short order cook since he was 18. Before then he was a craggy-skinned teenager, someone who had a crush on me, and whose mother used to sneak joints with me out on the roof of Global Instruments.

The waitress had just taken away my friend's empty plate of mozzarella cheese sticks and my two Reuben SuperMelts, when seconds later she was back with a tall scalloped cup of Forbidden Fudge Brownie. "Compliments of him," she said, pointing to this tall, string-bean-of-a-fella at the kitchen's swing door, his lips pressed into a ridiculously wide grin.

\* \* \*

Rudy is helping me separate my whites from my colors at Matt's Laundry Mat when he says he wants to get serious. As in move-in serious. I laugh in his face, but he seems genuinely hurt by it.

"When did we start being boyfriend girlfriend?" I ask.

"What do you call what we've been doing for three months?"

"Keeping company."

He lowers his eyes.

"Besides, look at me. Have you noticed I'm preggers?"

"And beautiful!"

"Yeah, and almost twice your age."

"That's lame, and you know it," he says.

"Okay. How about I'm not in love with you?"

I figure that will stop him cold from contemplating ordering matching towels and fine dinner ware, but he folds my Target oversized underwear, tosses it into my blue plastic bin, and smiles, "Not yet."

\* \* \*

I could've told him his pants were too baggy or his hair was too chestnutty, or any other far-fetched reason why we shouldn't get

serious, but I've come to the conclusion that some people are simply attached by one long chain link to their past. It started with my Polish great grand-father who sailed across the ocean to strike up a new life in America, leaving behind his wife of 24 years; then came my grandfather, who fell in love with the cuts of brisket and onion sauce and the wife of the butcher who cut them; my father left my mother three months before I was born. I've never met the man.

"It's not passed down like autism," Rudy scoffs.

Rudy is a good guy, but he doesn't know shit. For instance, what does he know about the invisible linkage, the DNA that runs like a deep, cavernous current inside the chest? That one infinitesimal speck of DNA that makes a man decide to flee instead of fight?

"You'll turn into my father," I bark back at him. "And I'll become my mother."

Days later, he corners me with a proposal. "You don't have to be exclusive."

"But you think I'll come around."

"Yep."

"You sure of that?"

"Yep."

I answer, "Nice to be young and believe anything you want is possible."

\* \* \*

Rudy fails to tell me that he got an acceptance letter from Rutgers University, starting in September. After seeing the movie *Fracture* and driving out of the parking lot, I notice the crisp white envelope on his back seat. Rudy tries to rip the letter out of my hand, but I smack his hand away. "What's Kinesiology?" I say, once I've finished reading.

"Study of human movement." He shrugs. "I figured why say anything when I'm not going."

I imagine myself heading off to college life, the chance to get the hell out of Brigantine. "Don't be a fuck face," I tell him.

"What? I can go later."

"You can fall in love later, too."

What this crazy kid prefers to do is waste his youth on me, whether it's reading Jim Clancy novels while lying on my couch, or in my kitchen scribbling a crossword puzzle as I suck down pickled onions and lick salsa out of a jar. He likes these kinds of moments, he says, because he likes stillness, and the ability to put his hand on my belly for hours on end. I used to love the stillness, but that was a long time ago. Now I hate the stillness, the waiting around. Let me tell you, there's no virtue in waiting. For what's so great about waiting for something that might not even happen?

Too much can go wrong.

\* \* \*

On Friday nights, Rudy likes to treat me to chicken quesadillas and a clamboat basket at *Friendly's* before his shift starts. Afterwards we share a Mocha Mud Crush with long silver spoons, but I notice his eyes darting to every Tom, Dick and Harry who walks through the glass doors.

"What gives?"

He informs me that he's sizing up the kind that could be my father. "Temporarily, you know, one that can give you away."

"That's about the nuttiest thing I've ever heard."

He doesn't answer me, instead letting a silence drag on between us. Finally, I say, "What do you plan on saying?"

"I'm gonna ask him to give me your hand, and then I'm gonna slug him."

That night in bed, I actually let myself dream a little. If I had a boy, and the three of us became an instant family. And maybe because everything was going along so swimmingly, I'd start popping them out one by one, until we produced a gaggle of them, because you never know when your luck is going to end. Then, because it is Friday night, we'd pack them into our white, station wagon Ford Taurus and head over to *Friendly's*, because Rudy's the new owner, and because Friday nights will always be *Friendly's* night out with the little tykes.

But just as I think I can convince myself of this, I surprise Rudy at work and find him chatting it up with two girls in a booth. One of

them is twirling her long blond locks around her middle finger. The other is batting her eyes, giving Rudy the come-hither look. I spin around and head home. The next day, Rudy finds me lying on the couch with my right arm over my eyes. "I don't think you should come over anymore," I tell him.

"You don't mean that."

"No, really."

He wedges himself onto the couch beside me, rests his hand on my belly

We fall asleep this way.

\* \* \*

I force Rudy to go up to Rutgers, to see about the program. Not waste his life like I have mine. Reluctantly he goes.

And it's not more than two hours after he hits the road that a series of excruciating pains shoot fireworks through my abdomen. Then comes the bleeding. I rush back to the doctor, though the outcome is crystal clear before he ever puts a hand on me. "I'm sorry," he says.

He tells me to go home and wait. Things will happen naturally.

\* \* \*

It's been two days, but I haven't told Rudy. He calls, wanting to come over, but I blow him off, tell him the baby's got me sick and I need the rest. That night I fall asleep, for a while at least. I get up and have a drink. The sky is dark, not a hint of morning. I drink two more glasses from the scotch Wick left behind.

The next couple of days, I'm a certifiable ass to a clueless Rudy. Every time he calls I feed him something demented: Can't you take a hint? Shouldn't you be out drinking? Go fuck someone your own age.

Soon after the last call I get a knock on my back door.

And I don't know why seeing him standing there behind the screen, this boyish man-child, makes me spill my guts more than anything else. "I'm carrying the fetus until I expel it," I say. "It's a joke, get it?"

He comes in and stares stupidly at me. So I say, "It's dead," bringing the point home. Suddenly I can sense his skinny-ass spider

arms starting to unravel toward me. To fend them off I head to the couch and lie down.

But he squirms his way in at the end, by my suddenly aching feet. I don't want to look at him. I don't want to hear him start whimpering, the stupid fuck, which I'm sure is about to crank up. Too many times he's put his head on my belly and cried tears of joy. "For fuck's sake," I once said. "It's not even yours."

"Well, you love it?"

"Of course."

"Then everything that is an extension of you is you, and it is you I love."

I know his next move. He's going to begin crying softly, quietly. I want to hold him back. I want to tell him to leave. But instead I say, "Anyway, you can't lose something you never had."

Slowly he lowers his head, placing his left ear against the top of my belly.

"Oh, fuck. What the fuck?"

But it's not like he's listening. I feel his palm rest atop one of my hands, an ear press hard into my spongy flesh. He's done this before, to see if he can hear the baby's tiny, pounding heart.

"Rudy?"

But he doesn't answer me.

"You're not going to hear it," I say.  
He says, "I'm not listening for his."

