

These Babies I'm Not Having

by Nicole Monaghan

They're haunting me with every spotting. They're convincing me they'd be the unexpected blessing. They're confusing me when I look at my already-children, taking on the shape of this one's face, that one's gestures.

We've been settled for years, grateful for the real ones. The missed periods send me toward ghosts, toward acceptance of starting over, of rummaging for cast-off infant items. I calculate due dates, consider names, project them into adults with families and careers. These growing-not-growing things in my pelvis, they're manipulative and tiny.

I think of reactions: the other children's, my husband's, my mother's, my own.

I'll wait until it's certain. These babies are my secrets alone; I have respect for their ultimate hiding place. They'll scare me into silence. Each time I pee, I'll look for clues.

When the stick test is over and the singular line unmistakable, no matter the relief, disappointment curls up in the unseen place, fetal.

