
*Does anyone remember when the Pill was only a gleam in some doctor's
probably masculine eye, or a test-tube? When in almost every
high school there was one student who left classes in the middle of the year
to visit her aunt in Los Angeles and returned weeks later, looking neither tanned
nor well-rested?*

Candace.*

Ruth Graner



It was late in spring, 1965, and I was in the basement laundry room of our apartment. I had just lifted a basket of clothes and felt guilty because my mother-in-law had given me a long list of don'ts and this was one of them — of course, had I followed them all I would have had to stop even combing my hair — when I felt a quick, wet sensation. I left the clothes, knowing I might never see them again, and asked Mikel to walk up with me "like a big boy," because I knew even before I got into the bathroom what I would find. I was seven months pregnant and, in the words of the cognoscenti (my sister Shirley), I was "staining." Proof? A spot of blood, the size of a quarter, bloomed on my panties.



Do you remember the American couple who had four or five children and discovered that their next would be born with multiple and incurable handicaps? Denied an abortion, they flew — it made headlines — to another country, hounded by reporters wanting to know was it a girl or a boy, would they have more children? (When they did, it appeared as a five-liner somewhere at the back of the paper.)



I walked slowly down the hallway to my bedroom, keeping my legs close together as though *that* would avert a miscarriage, leaning over the mattress, barely skimming its surface, afraid to breathe deeply, *trying to keep my baby*, and then telephoning my doctor who was never in when I called, but that day actually answered the telephone.

"Get into bed," he said, "and stay there."

I was there already, but how long could I remain? Mikel was two — "the terrible twos" they were called, because at that age children got into everything. I could picture him methodically prying loose the childproof plaques I had placed over the electrical outlets, assembling a ladder of boxes and chairs to see what was *really* outside the window of our third-floor apartment, or worse. (Is every child born with the ancient impulse to defy gravity, to soar on currents of air with arms instead of wings, to hurl himself from the sofa, bed, dresser, hoping that *this* time he will take flight?)

I couldn't get into bed and stay there unless I had someone to look after him. I had stopped teaching when Mikel was born because daycare, as far as I knew, existed for only a very small and very impoverished group of mothers. Other women had to rely on friends, neighbours, or babysitters available through advertisements in the newspaper or private agencies. I had never had luck with an agency and I shunned the unknowns of the newspaper. (It was through an agency that I hired a woman who fell asleep on my couch about noon with a bottle. . . and it wasn't the baby's.)

My mother, through friends of friends, had found an elderly woman who turned the television set on before she took her coat off; fine for an evening out, but what would I do about the day?



*Have you seen the assemblage, the work of an artist, Edward Kienholz, called *The Illegal Operation*? The central object is a stuffed chair which could almost be a torso, surrounded by implements battered and bloody. One of them looks like a clothes hanger which has been twisted and shaped to form a long, pointed tool.*



David hurried home that night, white-faced, with TV dinners that he managed to burn and a telephone number he had seen tacked up in the supermarket.

Girl 17 wants light hswk. and
babysitting. Call Karen
M.E. 5-2890 (live-out)

She was a sweet girl, anxious to please, and *her* father interviewed *us*, but she buttered the hot-dog buns, clogged the toilet, and broke the motor of the vacuum cleaner beyond repair. Still, in the end, it was *she* who left us, exhausted.



Did you know, as I did, a woman with the beautiful name of Victorina du Charles who had two children whom she adored and whose third pregnancy was discovered during the course of an appendectomy? Because of the lesson of thalidomide no medication was given and none was requested. As the baby grew, the scar of the incision, among others, did not heal.

I saw her only once, in a supermarket, arrived home before I realized that it was her. Soon after there were rumours of a suicide attempt, hospitalization, or institutionalization, but to this day I have no idea what really became of Victorina du Charles.



The week that Karen left, a neighbour in the apartment building beside us telephoned. Pollyanne never

lacked household help. For ten dollars a week, room, and board, she had a continual flow of teen-aged girls who wanted some place to stay while they awaited the arrival of their babies. She had a young girl with her now and, because somebody had miscalculated, another teen-ager was waiting, anxiously, to take her place. If I would just take Candace for the two weeks before she had her baby, Pollyanne coaxed, I would at least have someone to answer the door-and keep an eye on Mikel.

I didn't want an expectant teen-ager living with me. Although I was no longer bleeding or confined to bed, one pregnancy, I felt, was all that I could handle. But Pollyanne was persistent.

We borrowed a folding cot from my sister, put it in Mikel's room, and the next afternoon Candace Logan walked over holding a small, blue cardboard suitcase. She wore a flowered maternity smock from which the colour of the roses had faded.

She had a tiny nose and small blue eyes. Her hair was long and blond and she should have been pretty, but there was an unfinished, insubstantial look to her, as though she were halfway to being something else but hadn't quite made it. She stood outside the doorway, tugging at her hair, and the first thing she said to me was, "I know I look awful. I had to stop ironing my hair two months ago."

"You look just fine; come on in."

"I'm Candace Logan."

"I know. I've been expecting you." I paused. "Do you like people to call you Candy?"

She shook her head and said without smiling, "My mom says that if she wanted people to call me Candy, she would have named me Licorice."

I showed her around the apartment, apologizing because she would have to share Mikel's room.

"Oh, that's all right. Before I came to Pollyanne's I had to sleep in someone's basement. Ugh! I was sure a rat was coming to get me."

"How old are you now, Candace?"

"Fifteen, almost." She hurried on, "this is my first baby, too, honestly, not like some other kids. It was the first time, too, only nobody believes me. I didn't even like the guy. He gave me something to drink and then, well, I don't even remember. I bet I didn't even like it. . ."

She shook her head and her earrings, long strokes of gold-coloured metal, swayed. The lipstick on her upper lip was smeared on one side. She looked like a child who had snuck into her mother's closet and drawers to play dress-up.

After dinner she sat listening with me while I told Mikel his bedtime story. He fell asleep, his teddy bear safe under one arm, but awoke hours later crying, when Candace, in pyjamas, tiptoed in. She started to cry, too, and after I'd been in and out of their room what seemed half the night, she asked me if I had a teddy bear for her. I gave her the black-and-white one we'd been saving for the new baby.

During the week I taught her how to telephone Eaton's to order something from the catalogue. She bought a pink cotton smock and I found earrings that matched it exactly.

Her father came over once in a rusting green car. He was one of those men, I think, who seem always to be needing a shave. He called me *missus*, smoked a cigar (even my father-in-law was forbidden to do that until I stopped being pregnant), and was so much taller than Candace that for the first time it occurred to me that she probably hadn't stopped growing. Long before he left I was the one, in the bedroom, sobbing.

I wish I could say that I took Candace under my ever-growing wing. I was, after all, twenty-four to her almost fifteen. I would not always live on the top floor of an apartment without an elevator, with a husband still in school, and someday I would return to teaching. But I felt ill the whole time, experiencing every trivial disorder, despite the funny cartoons in my doctor's *Pointers for Pregnancy Pamphlet*, while Candace thrived. Her cheeks remained pink, she never grew tired, she gained what was then considered to be the correct amount of weight.

But she was lonesome. (Pollyanne's two weeks was an exaggeration — two months was more likely.) She didn't get along with the new girl at Polly's. No one telephoned, not even the mother who never called her Candy.

She had long ago been persuaded (by her family? doctor? social worker?) to give her baby up for adoption. She had decided that she would look at it once, in the hospital, and then never again.

When I realized that I would probably have my baby before hers and return with it while she was with us, I contacted one of the few places in the city that housed expectant, unmarried mothers, Weatherby Haven, run by a charitable group in a converted mansion.

She wanted to look at it alone, travelled there by streetcar, apprehensive about moving again, about curfews, limited access to the fridge. But she returned excited, exhilarated. They were all about the same age, they took turns doing each other's hair, swapped clothes and nail polish. She just couldn't wait!

On the day she was leaving, her father came to drive her over, waiting outside, smoking. She packed up all her things and then turned to me, asking if she could keep the white teddy.

The last time I saw her it was from the window of our apartment. She was walking down the sidewalk towards her father and the green car. In one arm she carried her suitcase and over the shoulder of the other she held the white teddy bear, whose black eyes looked back, staring up at me.

*This short story shared second prize in the *Canadian Woman Studies*/Council of York Student Federation literary contest for 1982.

What Is Left*

... their names were Margerie
and Mercie

No pill then. They bore again and again.
Through village church went Thomas
Brende
to marry and to bury, a dragon helmet
mounted over extravagant trifoliation:
18 children pruned to 6 at his death.

I stop there often, half-way between
shops
and housing estate. The pram creaks
like a Spanish galleon in full sail:
one in, one on a chair and groceries
below.

"Here lyeth buried the body of Margerie"
(1st wife, 10 kids) Did she buy ribbon
at Whitsun fair? Take the Thames to
the city?

Or was it all cleaning and weaning?
Only, "Dyed the second of June 1564"

Then Mercie (2nd wife, 8 kids) for
a fortyish Thomas, she much younger.
Would she had told of the mummers,
the quick step with Thomas, breathless,
still a good leg, and laughter, the thrush
fluting in berrybushes. A silence.
"She left her life the 23 of April 1597"

Suzanne Collins
Toronto, Ontario

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