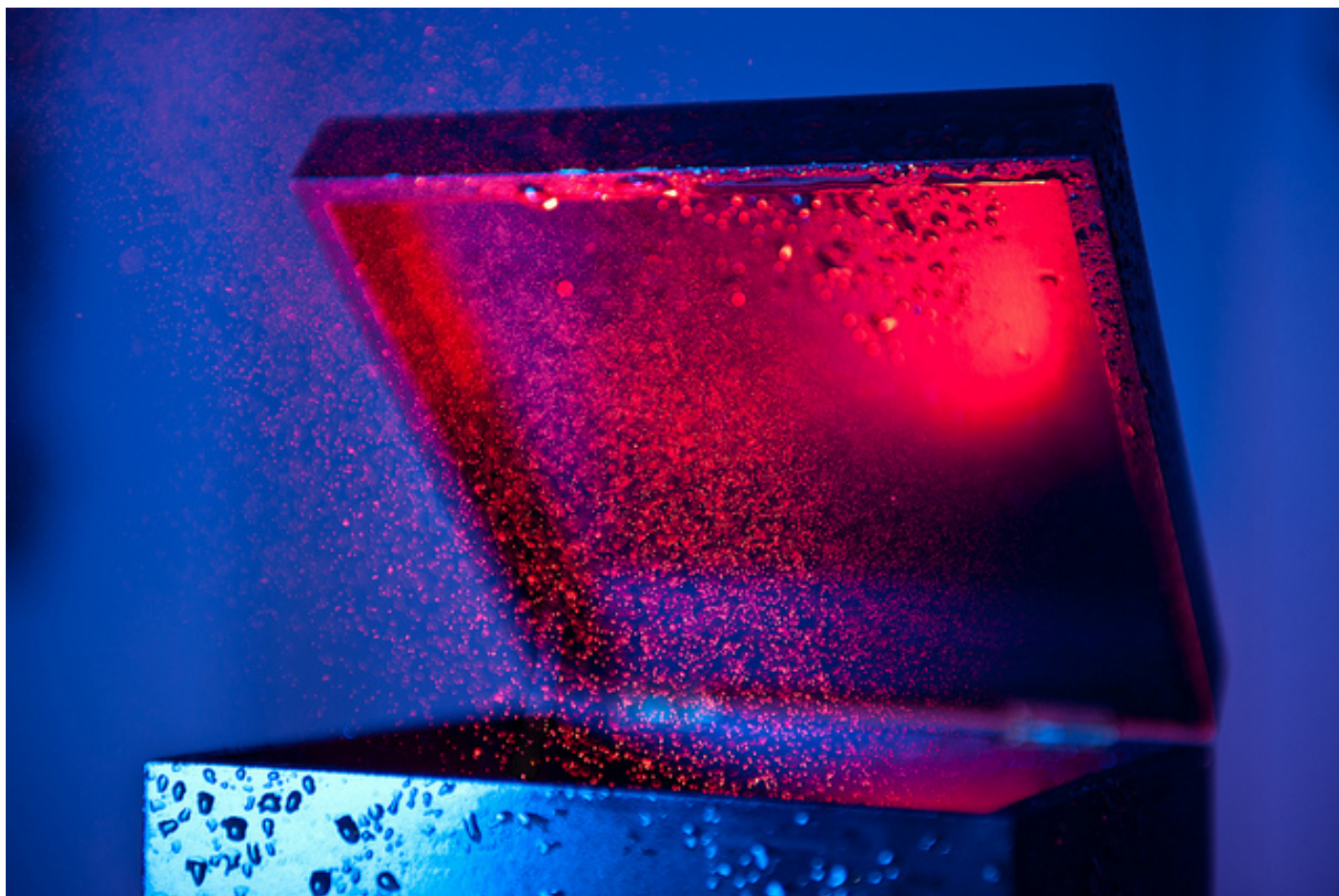


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Flash Nonfiction by Lori Michelle Hawks

Releasing the Unexpected



The day before our Halloween party, I decided to buy a test—just to be sure I wasn't drowning a baby with booze, I laughed to myself.

It came in a sealed, theft-proof Plexiglas box. *This is odd.* I handed it to the cashier at the grocery store, absentmindedly waiting for the code to be cracked.

She fumbled with it. I checked the time.

Sorry, she said. I'll have to call someone.

The line behind me grew. The impatient stares began. *You know, this is actually very embarrassing,* I said. She didn't change her flat expression.

(function(i,s,o,g,r,a,m){i['GoogleAnalyticsObject']=r;i[r]=i[r]||function(){(i[r].q=i[r].q||[]).push(arguments)},i[r].l=1*new Date();a=s.createElement(o),m=s.getElementsByTagName(o)[0];a.async=1;a.src=g;m.parentNode.insertBefore(a,m)})(window,document,'script','https://www.google.com/analytics.com/analytics.js','ga'); ga('create', 'UA-18260536-1', 'auto'); ga('send', 'pageview');

Manager for key at Register 6, echoed through the aisles.

A stocky woman with puffy eyes approached, shaking an official bunch of keys. Together, they finally got the thing scanned.

\$16.99, the cashier said. I handed over a twenty, surprised by the cost. I guess that's why they're locked in plastic boxes. People can't afford the test, never mind the baby-

The box made it home with me, the first one I'd ever bought. My husband and I had talked about a baby, but only in hushed tones and hypotheticals. We'd only begun trying two months before.

Still, a year earlier, I'd purchased a carved set of animal blocks from a thrift store. I couldn't resist the purple dog, the blue cat, the green bear—the way their curved wooden notches slid together to form the wall of a small zoo. They'd come in a Ziploc bag with a \$2 yellow sticker, creating a stirring I felt deep in my heart and belly. I'd placed them in our tiny spare bedroom, three floors up, and it wasn't long before I added a fuzzy pair of pink hand-knit booties. I'd stacked them behind their zoo wall, only slightly embarrassed when my husband discovered my secret stash.

The collection had collected dust. Now and then, I would imagine our baby licking the kitty block. But there was no baby. At the thrift store, I would hold maternity clothes in my hands and put them back on their rack, thinking *bad luck*.

When I got home that day, I unpacked our groceries. My husband scooped the cat litter. We got ready for a trip to the pumpkin farm—just the two of us—and for putting the final golden touches on our Egyptian costumes.

It was late afternoon when I pulled the test from its grocery bag. In the bathroom, I broke open the box, discarding the protective Plexiglas. *What the heck*, I thought, as I peed on the stick. Distracted by costumes and pumpkins, I left it on the bathtub. The directions said to wait three minutes, but I didn't even notice the time.

I washed my hands, then fixed my make-up for our outing. Blush, mascara, eye liner, lip gloss: These were the details that held my attention. Finally, I grabbed the stick to toss it in the trash. I motioned my arm outward toward the bin, about to launch.

Then I stopped.

Pregnant.

I stared at the word displayed in digital black letters. I'd spent almost twenty dollars so I wouldn't have to squint at faded pink lines. Now, I held the test out in front of me, using two fingers like tongs. I waved it around, wondering if the letters would disappear from the screen like drawings on an Etch A Sketch.

The word didn't budge. I kept the stick at arm's length. I walked it into the living room, where my husband was reclining on his comfy chair watching TV, his feet up, his head back. I waved it at him, up and down, through the air. I kept waving it.

I couldn't say it—the word on the screen. The only word I could repeat was *it, it, it*.

I flung the stick at him, shaking, plopping onto the ottoman at his feet. *It*.

An hour later, we took *it* with us to pick our pumpkin. We smiled nervously, the drive quiet, the moon full.

Try another one, he said when we got home. The box I'd purchased included a set of three. All along, I'd expected to need more, perhaps many more.

I don't know if it can work again right away.

Well, try, he said. *Maybe it's wrong.*

Okay. I waited.

He stood by the door. *Well?*

It. We.

Art Information

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Lori Michelle Hawks is wanted by her public library for overdue book fines. She has loved writing ever since she began drawing in crayon on the walls above her crib. As a grown-up, Lori has taught English and composition for twelve years. She was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age 27 and began blogging about her illness. After an intense two-year struggle with miscarriage and infertility, Lori and her husband Aryn welcomed their twin boys, Ashtyn and Ace, in June of 2015.

Photo credit: [Jennifer Carter](#). [4]

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