

rejected by her parents. But it is just as true of the pregnant girl rejected by her parents, and our call to help her is just as urgent.

Chapter 8

Listening in Washington, D.C.

The night is black, but light glitters along Wisconsin Avenue, ricocheting off the shiny cars and glass-fronted buildings. The street is ablaze with white light, while pedestrians dart through the maze of lanes and tangled cross-streets. I have been circling the area for a quarter of an hour trying to find the church where the session is to be held. After getting (wrong) directions I finally stumble on it: an extensive pile of red brick, extending far into the block, and utterly dark. In comparison, the McDonald's across the street looks inviting and festive. Fast food seems like a more certain source of life and joy than the hidden, brooding church.

Susan, the local coordinator, has worked untiringly to set up the evening. In the beige meeting room she has set chairs around a central table, with refreshments arranged in the center. Each attendee received materials about the project ahead of time, so after brief preliminaries we can begin.

Elizabeth, a brunette with alert, dark eyes, takes the lead. She has had two abortions; the first, when she was sixteen, took place in 1968. She was in a casual relationship with a boy, and got pregnant the second time she had sex. "I hardly even knew how babies were made," she says, "and the guy was even more immature than me, which is hard to believe. We were both lost people, struggling. I didn't know there was such a thing as abortion; it was my mother who talked to the doctor and set it up.

"I fought her on it, but she was adamant. She had seen other girls have their lives destroyed by gossip as the community turned away from them; they would live up to that image of being a slut—you know, 'I've got the name, I may as well play the game.' My

mom said, "That's not going to happen to you."

I ask if she was ambivalent about this course—did some part of her fantasize about having the baby and starting her own family? Elizabeth responds, "Yes, in fact I had a husband all picked out—a former boyfriend." The other participants smile at this. "Of course, he wanted no part of that. He took off running, and I don't think he's been seen since."

Chuckles spread across the group. I realize there's a different tone here than in previous gatherings. These women seem relaxed and confident, and even with such difficult discussion material at hand they laugh comfortably. Four of them, that is. Sandi came in looking pale and subdued; she wears a navy sweatshirt and no makeup. Her smiles come a few seconds late, socially correct but fleeting. Sometimes she lowers her head into her hands. Tonight she will be the last to tell her story.

Elizabeth continues. "The thing I was fighting most was a sense of shame, the image of people shaking their fingers at me—and some people did! If I was going to continue the pregnancy, I would have had to have a support system: someone to tell me that I was a decent, good person, and that I would be taken care of. The Nurturing Network has a whole wonderful program now, and I think if there had been something like that then, I would not have had the abortion.

"But at the time the prospects were pretty grim. You went to St. Anne's Maternity Home, where, according to the scuttlebutt, the nuns kept you in seclusion in sackcloth and ashes for the next eight months. It was a horrible prospect to imagine. If I had had a family situation, away from my own family and school, it might have worked out—if I could have avoided the shame and the stigma of being called a slut."

I ask about the circumstances of her later abortion, at age twenty-four. "The situation was equally dysfunctional; I was in a relationship with a married man, who was living with *another* woman. When he said, 'No, I won't stand by you,' I told him good-bye. All my emotions had been bound up in this man. I was so traumatized that I don't know how I could have avoided abortion at that point. I had no spiritual resources. I walked away from the church after my first abortion;

I figured God had written me off, since I couldn't live up to the ideal of what a good Catholic girl should be."

We discuss that in some ways it's easier for a teenager to continue a pregnancy than for an adult; a twenty-four-year-old can't tell her boss that she's going to visit a relative in Kansas for a few months. "In fact, at the time of the second abortion I was living with my mother, and I didn't want her to know," says Elizabeth. "That would have made it a *little* awkward.

"With the first one, my mother's attitude was, 'I can't let this happen to you, you're my baby,'" Elizabeth goes on. "How can you fight against that? If she had said, 'Get out of my house,' I could have said, 'Okay.' But 'I can't let this happen to you'—how can you fight against that?"

Talk of parents prompts Kelly to begin her story. "I was twenty-two when I got pregnant. I always had before me the example of my older sister, who had had a baby out of wedlock. I remembered how terribly hurt and shamed my parents were, so I thought, 'Okay, I'll be your best and brightest.'

"I was nineteen weeks pregnant before I realized it; I rationalized that I always had irregular periods, and didn't really admit what was going on. When I did, I was mostly worried that if I told my dad, he would die of a heart attack—not that it would break his heart, but that he would literally die."

I ask if her father was in poor health. "Not really, but he was always a great worrier. He was very kind and loving, but I was afraid this would destroy him. Not so much my mother. To this day they don't know. I often think I could tell my mother, but I don't think she could keep it from my father—and I just couldn't hurt him that way.

"I had been dating the boy for four years, but he was terrified. He didn't want to admit that it was his child." A chorus of "Oh!"s—that really is a painful, and humiliating, rejection. "For my part, I was on that college-career track and didn't think I could handle beginning a family.

"I did go to a pregnancy care center for my pregnancy test. While I was waiting for the results, they showed me photos of aborted fetuses. I guess this was supposed to make me realize what I was doing,

but it had the opposite effect—it made me angry, just shut me off like that.” She snaps her fingers. “In a way those pictures become a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

Picking up on this last phrase, I comment that sometimes the grisly photos coincide with the woman’s plummeting self-esteem in a thought like, “Yes, I’m just the sort of person who would do something that terrible.”

Elizabeth adds, “And they hadn’t even told you about any alternatives yet.” She goes on, with exaggerated emphasis, “You’re thinking, ‘I don’t have any *choice*, and now you have to tell me that I’m a *murderer* on top of the fact that I’m a *slut* and I have no *choice*.’” As the group begins to giggle, someone sings out, “And have a nice day.” More laughter. “Thank you for sharing that with me,” Elizabeth concludes archly, while Bette chimes in, “And I’m probably going to go to hell, on top of it.” Elizabeth finishes, with dignity, “This is, in fact, *not* one of my better days.” The tumbling giggles remind me that this is *not* one of my typical groups.

As the laughter subsides, I ask if Kelly broke up with the boy after the abortion; she says that the relationship lasted a couple more years, then she went into “a lot of typical post-abortion things, for example promiscuity.

“But I do remember a frantic week—they had told me, ‘We have only one week to do this,’ because I was so far along. I remember thinking that, if I’m five months along, there’s only four months to go, maybe I should stick it out. I was making phone calls to different colleges, trying to find an internship or something so I could finish the pregnancy. It didn’t click, and all of a sudden it was like, ‘This is the last day, and if we don’t do it now, we can’t do it at all.’”

The larger the baby, the more difficult the task of getting it out before birth, and the more danger to the mother. In the first three months, the fetal child can be pulled to pieces and vacuumed out of the womb with a narrow-gauge plastic tube. (Before the suction aspiration machine became available in the early 1970s, the usual method of cleaning out the uterus was by scraping with a metal blade called a curette; this was Dilation and Curettage, or D & C, far more risky to the woman than the newer suction method.)

After the first trimester, the fetus can be killed by injecting a poisonously concentrated salt solution into the womb, after which natural labor will set in to expel the dead child. (This method is used less often in recent years.) This lengthy procedure—sometimes lasting twenty-four hours—is hard on the woman, who feels the child thrashing in its chemical-burn bath for an hour or so until it dies, and who may be alone when the napalm-red body of her son or daughter is born. No woman who sees this ever forgets.

A late-pregnancy method that is easier for the woman—but harder for the doctor—is the procedure known as Dilation and Evacuation, or D & E. The woman visits the doctor a couple of days before the procedure to have natural-fiber rods (called laminaria) inserted in the mouth of the womb to slowly open it. When she returns for the procedure she is usually placed under general anesthesia. The doctor then reaches into the womb with forceps and by brute force pries off pieces of the child—a leg, an arm—and reassembles it on a table nearby. When the bloody jigsaw puzzle is complete the procedure is over. Most clinic staff find this process emotionally grueling; at one clinic specializing in D & E abortion, eight of fifteen staff members reported emotional problems, experiencing the procedure as “destructive and violent.”¹

The risk to the woman is greater, too, as during the process jagged pieces of the fetus can damage the interior of the uterus. More recently a procedure has been developed to avoid that uterine damage. In Partial Birth Abortion, or Intact Dilation and Extraction (D & X), the living fetus’s limbs and torso are delivered feet first, up to the head; a tube is inserted into the base of the skull and the brains are suctioned out, killing the child. The doctor who presented this technique at an abortionists’ convention said that he had done over seven hundred of these and was pleased with the results; a colleague was using the technique through the ninth month of pregnancy.²

Kelly tells us that her abortion was a D & E. “I didn’t have general anesthesia—they did it under local. They dilate your cervix for two days and the third day you have the procedure. So the first two days I was basically in from 8:30 A.M. until 6:00 P.M., as they inserted laminaria, had me wait, brought me back to check that everything was placed properly, and so forth.”

"And I thought I went through hell," comments Elizabeth.

"Yes, it was pretty traumatic," Kelly sighs. "They tell you, 'Once we start, we can't stop.' And you're thinking—and it's obviously very sick, you're nauseous. . . ." she trails off. I ask Elizabeth if her first abortion was the old-fashioned D & C.

"No, it was the middle of the second trimester, a saline abortion. So I literally went through labor. But I didn't go through," she gestures to Kelly, "what you went through."

"Well, there's no nice way," says Kelly. "We've all heard the graphic details. But if I'd had a saline abortion I think I would have ended my life right then. In my case you're seeing what you're trying to tell yourself you aren't seeing, but you obviously are. . . ."

"I had a really active denial process going there," says Elizabeth. "It helped that I didn't know what was going to happen. The doctor said, 'We're going to give you an injection of saline.' He didn't say, 'You're going to go into labor and give birth to a dead fetus.' So ignorance was a big help there, as well as denial."

Kelly agrees. "The procedure destroys the things you make up to make it easier on yourself. I actually had this conversation with God, where I said, 'I'm going to send this one back to you, and then when I'm ready to get married, *this same baby's* going to come back.' I really believed that.

"The counselors at the clinic told me, 'Be careful because you're Roman Catholic, and they'll come after you with the Catholic guilt, if not now, five years from now; they're going to try to make you believe that what you've done is wrong, but be strong and rise above it.' The first two years after my abortion, I was probably the strongest pro-choice supporter you could find. It was my way of making sure that what I had done was right. I often wonder about some of the louder pro-choice voices out there, because I remember feeling like that. You have to keep telling everybody that you did the right thing."

"I was a big contributor to Planned Parenthood and NARAL," says Elizabeth. "It was like: this must be the right position, because I have to be okay; if not . . . I'd have to look at what I've done."

"I went the opposite way," says Bette. "But to start at the beginning, I was nineteen, and I was having problems even admitting that

I was having premarital sex. I was having a lot of guilt, and I rationalized it by saying, 'We do love each other; at least I'm not a'"—searching for the right word—"slut.'"

As she says this Bette gestures unconsciously toward Elizabeth, who responds by leading the group in an eruption of laughter. "Like Exhibit A over here," Bette continues, provoking more mirth. It takes a minute or so for order to resume.

"I didn't mean it to sound like that, of course," says Bette, wiping the laughter-tears from the corners of her eyes. "I meant that it was a relationship with someone I loved. We stayed together three years after the abortion. In fact, as sick as it sounds, I stayed with him partly because I felt we had a special bond: he was the father of my dead child.

"I also thought, how could anyone else ever love me? If I met another guy and one day had to reveal this secret, he might say, 'You did what? You're out the door.' But this guy knows it all and still says he loves me.

"I had very regular periods, right to the day, so when I was late I knew something was up. I panicked; I started telling God, 'I'll do anything, I'll never have sex again, I'll become a nun, I'll give a pint of blood a day, whatever you want.' I took a pregnancy test and when it came back positive I was saying, 'How accurate can those things be? They're only twelve dollars.' I just kept clinging to hope.

"My boyfriend and I had decided that we weren't ready to get married. Since I was adopted, I said, 'I think adoption is the way to go.' He said, 'I can't live my life knowing my flesh and blood is out there being raised by someone else.' We had a huge fight. I kept saying, 'But I was adopted, I turned out okay; you supposedly love me.' I was really hurt.

"I ended up sitting on my sofa with him and my friend Carrie, while she told me that she had had an abortion, that it wasn't so bad, it didn't hurt, it's over quickly, and so forth. I kept thinking, 'I can't believe this is happening to me; this isn't what I want.' When I went to answer the door, I could hear my boyfriend saying to her, 'Carrie, you've got to talk her into this.' I was furious to think my friends were plotting against me.

"But I was worried about how I could tell my parents. If I had had someone to go with me, just to verbalize the fact that I was pregnant, it would have helped a lot. I know they would have supported me in continuing the pregnancy. But I couldn't bear to tell them I was having sex. I was so embarrassed, and I felt panicky about solving the problem quickly.

"Carrie gave me the number of the doctor who did her abortion, and I called to make an appointment; they told me I was too early, and would have to wait a week. I decided to have a pelvic exam at the University medical clinic to confirm the pregnancy, and the young doctor there really seemed to want to help me. He told me that I'd have to call back next week for the results, then he sat down to talk with me. He gave me brochures about pregnancy and adoption and seemed very kind. But I sat there with my head down, embarrassed and humiliated, thinking, 'I am pregnant, I am pregnant; he says I need to call next week, but if I'm not pregnant why's he talking to me like this?' As I look back, it seems like he was the only person who really was reaching out to help me. But I just couldn't accept it from him—I felt so embarrassed.

"A week later my boyfriend and I were on our way to the abortion. It was an hour-long drive to the next city. On the way I actually made my boyfriend stop the car so I could go to a pay phone; I had this urge to call that young doctor and talk to him one more time. I asked for the results; he said, 'Well, it's confidential, you really need to come in.' I think he was just buying time, hoping to talk to me once more. I had to get on with it at this point. I hung up on him and we drove on.

"When I arrived for the abortion I was prepared for nothing. The only counseling I got was that, while the nurse took my blood pressure, she asked, 'Are you sure you want to do this?' and I said 'Yes.' When I first saw the doctor I was already in stirrups; she talked the whole time, saying, 'You'll feel some cramping, this'll take a few minutes, are you doing okay,' and I kept thinking, 'I can't believe I'm doing this.'

"As soon as it was over I fell into a very deep depression for several days. I was a total basket case. All I could do was lie on the sofa; I

wasn't going to classes or anything, and told my friends I was sick. Then I decided I just had to push it down and get on with my life, so that's when I moved on into repression and denial. But I thought, 'I'm never going to forget I've done this terrible thing. I'll never be who I was before—never be who I thought I was.' I told my boyfriend, 'This goes against everything that I believe,' and my boyfriend said, 'Me too.'

"If just one of those people, my boyfriend or another friend, had said, 'We can get through this, I'll be there for you,' I could have made it. But I feel like they were saying, 'I'll be there for you . . . if you have the abortion.' No one was extending themselves to be there if I didn't do what they wanted. I became very dependent, too; I wanted someone to take care of me, I wanted someone to make my decisions."

"People say to you, 'You're not ready to have a baby,' and you think, 'They sound so sure—I guess I'm not,'" adds Kelly.

"I knew there was a baby," says Bette. "I told my boyfriend, 'You know this is a baby,' because I was angry at him for pressuring me to do something I didn't want to do. But I never thought about how I could raise it or support it. I just thought, 'I'm pregnant, and this is a baby, and I'm going to kill it.'" She laughs at this brutal summary. "My reasons didn't even touch upon, 'How am I going to support the child?' It was more or less, 'I'm pregnant, I don't want to be. . . .'"

"I hear people say that women abort for convenience," Bette goes on. "It wasn't that, as if the practical worries made pregnancy too inconvenient. It was more a feeling that this is simply not the way life works. I'm single, I'm too young to be married, too young to have children, I have to finish college. Pregnancy is not part of it."

Kelly agrees. "It wasn't so much, 'I don't have the money for a baby.' I was smart enough to know that there were resources out there to help me, financial help or adoption. It was more like, 'I'm just not supposed to be pregnant now.'"

Elizabeth brings up another pressure: the need for secrecy. "Of course with me, it was a married man, living with another woman, and having an affair with me, and probably twelve other women too, for all I know! How could I be pregnant and not tell people who the

father is? Someone would find out. We worked in the same place. This had to be a very secret affair."

"All that secrecy. I lived with that," Bette adds. "I thought of it as my skeleton in the closet; I was going to go to the grave with only three people in the whole world knowing—my boyfriend and my two friends. Now practically the whole world knows!" I recall Bette in her role as pro-life organizer, standing at the microphone to tell her story at a vigil for women who died of injuries from legal abortions.

"I felt like no one could know the secret," Bette explains, "because I was so devastated and so ashamed. I felt a conflict because my behavior was totally different from my beliefs. If I had been in better spiritual shape, if I'd felt like I wasn't totally alone and God was up there helping me out, I wouldn't have done it."

I point out that there's a double bind in this situation for people like Bette with strong moral beliefs: if you're noble and good and strong, you certainly don't kill your baby. But if you follow that through and continue the pregnancy, you fear that people will point a finger at you and think you're a slut—not someone noble, good, and strong.

Bette agrees. "So by choosing abortion I could make sure I was the only one who knew that I wasn't noble and good and strong."

Elizabeth adds, "And maybe I can get through my life without anyone else figuring it out."

I ask Sandi and Barbet if they want to say anything about their experiences, and Barbet volunteers right away. "I know I've repressed a lot of this. I was twenty and dating a guy from Germany. I knew I was pregnant even at the moment of conception, and by the time I was two days late I was sure. He'd had a girlfriend in Germany who had had an abortion, so he told me, 'Don't worry, there's nothing to it, just do it as early as you can. It's quick, it's easy, it's over.'"

"We came up with every rationalization in the world." Barbet begins a singsong recital: "Too many people on the planet, we're going to die of starvation. Don't bring an unwanted, unloved child into the world. You can't possibly carry a child for nine months and put it up for adoption. People at pregnancy care centers are religious fanatics. And you don't want to get *fat*."

"To me at that time, having an abortion didn't seem like a big

deal," Barbet goes on. "I was hanging around a very liberal college crowd, and all my friends were pro-choice. I was told that it was just a bunch of cells, with less development than some primitive stage of fish. So I made an appointment for two days after Thanksgiving—that's the anniversary. I went without my boyfriend, because he didn't want to miss his flying lesson." She rolls her eyes.

"There was very little pre-abortion counseling. Before I knew it I was on the table. They gave me no sympathy, other than somebody holding my hand, then this loud machine—horrible—then it was over." She ponders this, as if still finding it hard to believe. "We went into the recovery room and some women were vomiting and fainting. I didn't feel so hot either—I was seeing spots in front of my eyes. I went home that night, and my boyfriend had invited friends over for tea and cake! Hours later, after they left, I told him I wouldn't ever, ever, ever do that again."

I turn toward the still-silent Sandi, who has ridden out all our lively talk and laughter with a wan smile. "Sandi, do you feel like talking? You don't have to if you don't want to," I offer quietly.

"Yeah, I just, yeah," she says, collecting herself. "It's interesting to listen to other people. I've thought about my abortion a lot. It was when I was a sophomore in college, back in 1982."

As Sandi begins her story, the earlier suggestion of depression and lassitude fades. She appears on the contrary to harbor a calm intelligence and a deliberate quality. Her quietness seems rooted in self-possession.

"I had been raised Catholic, but my father was an atheist. I was the youngest of five girls, and when my sister got pregnant, my dad forced her to have an abortion. This was completely against my mother's beliefs, but she was helpless to fight it. Then another sister got pregnant; this one was pretty strong-willed and she refused to have an abortion, and ended up having the baby. My dad threw her out of the house, but eventually he came to accept it and they were reconciled.

"I learned from my sisters' mistakes, and was determined to be the one who never did wrong. I had a close relationship with God in high school, but as the years passed I wanted to make decisions in my

life without Him. I got involved with a guy who I knew wasn't good for me—I got raped, in my opinion—and that threw me into a lot of confusion. One day I decided to start drinking. Pretty soon I was involved with alcohol and guys and thought that was the way to begin a relationship—this is what guys want, this is normal, this is what I'll do.

“So when I was a sophomore in college I visited a friend who was graduating. I had already told him that sex was out of the question, but we went to a party and I got drunk, then somebody gave me something to smoke. After that I don't remember much, but I'm pretty sure that that's when I got pregnant.

“When I found out I was pregnant, I wouldn't consider abortion. But when I told the guy that I planned to go the adoption route, he said, ‘How could you even consider it?’ He wouldn't be supportive of the pregnancy, but he offered to pay half the cost of the abortion.

“When I think about the decision to have the abortion, I remember several things. One factor, although it wasn't conscious, is that I wanted to do anything I could to hang onto this relationship. Two, I wanted to keep my scholarships and not interrupt my education. Three, my dad had died just a year before in heart surgery. The guy said, ‘If you tell your mom, it could be the last straw.’”

“What a prince!” someone comments.

“Another part of my decision was the rationalization that I considered this life we're living to be not all that great. I was thinking that life is pretty tough, and I didn't ask to be put here. So what if this kid skips over this life and goes straight to heaven? That was my thinking, like I was doing it a favor in a way.

“When I went in the recovery room everyone was just bawling their eyes out, but I felt very closed. The next day I was home alone and resting, and I felt like God spoke to me. What I felt He said was that I didn't have the right to make that choice. I did not have the authority to decide to take my child's life. This meant a lot to me at the time, but it didn't change my life. I still was getting into bad relationships with men and drinking. All that changed over time, as God led me on.

“In the last year or so God has been showing me that every single

part of my decision has dramatically affected my life since then. The fact that I didn't want my mother to find out has affected my relationship with her and even her relationship with my sisters; she compares them with me and thinks that I'm the daughter who never let her down. She reacts to my other sisters as if she's always disappointed in them, and I've allowed this unrealistic view to continue.”

The group listens attentively to Sandi. The woman who initially appeared most damaged, most fragile, is turning out to be a surprising source of stability and insight.

“Another area is with my career. The fact that I didn't want to interrupt my education led to a compulsive need to advance in my work, and I became a nervous wreck about it. I wasn't able to relax until I realized that God was taking care of me.

“The abortion decision also impacted my view of children. I have thirteen nieces and nephews, and I was always very critical of them, always saying, ‘Keep them quiet,’ ‘You're in the way.’ Then God said to me, ‘You don't have to keep on making that choice.’ It was as if I had to keep proving to myself that I had done the right thing in clearing the baby out of my way.” This insight is so striking that it causes a hubbub of discussion.

Then Sandi continues her carefully thought-out presentation. “The most valuable thing, one that has taken years and years for me to realize, has to do with my decision that it was okay to let this kid die, because this life isn't so great anyway.

“I've come to realize that there is tremendous value in this life, that it really is a gift. Coming to that was the toughest part for me, because then I had to admit that I took this great gift away from my child. But I also realized that, even though I did this terrible thing, God loves me; He loved me even before I said, ‘I'm sorry, it was wrong.’ So I'm coming to the realization that I have individual value in God's eyes, that He loves me as a person, and there is a reason He created me.”

A few eyes are glistening as Sandi goes on quietly, “There's a lot of other things. One day when I was getting ready for work, God said to me, ‘You know, you're a mother.’ That was a real healing for me, to get to the point where I could say, ‘I can mourn for this child.’ Women

after abortion don't have anywhere to go to mourn the death. Everything's supposed to be okay, it's supposed to be fine because it's what you needed to do, and there was nothing there in the womb anyway. But God says: 'You're a mother.'

"And after so many years of having wrong relationships with men, I just was unsure about whether I could have a right understanding and the right motives. God said, 'You don't ever have to give yourself to anyone outside My will again.' I still was afraid of attracting men in the same old ways, and God said, 'I am going to give you back your femininity.' I could learn to be a woman all over again, in a healthy way.

"It's also really important to me now to tell my mother about the abortion. It will correct our relationship for her to know that I did let her down. It will do a great deal of good, both between us and in her relationships with her other daughters."

This leads the women to reflect on the people in their own lives who know, or don't know, about the abortion. Should they tell?

Barbet says, in a shaky voice, that she has a daughter who is just nineteen months old. "Sometimes I ask myself, am I going to tell her? What if she thinks that I would throw her away too?" As she breaks into real tears, she looks down, saying, "I didn't mean to cry."

"Premarital sex is a secret," says Bette. "The abortion is a secret. You mourn in secret. It's all a big dark secret, and that's not a healthy way to deal with it. When I finally told my parents, they actually took it much better than I expected. But we decided not to tell my grandmothers; it would be too much for them."

Elizabeth adds, "My mother suffered a great deal from my first abortion, and she blames herself for everything that went wrong in my adolescence. If I told her about the second abortion, it would only make her miserable."

"My big fear was in telling my pro-life friends," says Bette. "It seemed like I would be telling them, 'I did what you despise.' But I was surprised at the way people accepted me. They were able to recognize and validate my pain. The pro-choice side can't do that—they have too much need to pretend that it isn't there."

The pressure of time forces us to break up the meeting. Chairs

scoot back across the linoleum, and the remains of the snacks go into a bag. The group is in a more reflective mood now, compared with the earlier jocularity. Outside on the sidewalk the dim church looms once more overhead, while the noises of traffic reach us from the busy street one block away. In the vast and vacant parking lot we say our good-byes, hug, and lock ourselves into our metal capsules to follow our solitary paths home.