

Rob Walker: WHEN LAUGHTER GOES VIRAL Jesse Lichtenstein: WHEN DIPLOMACY GOES VIRAL

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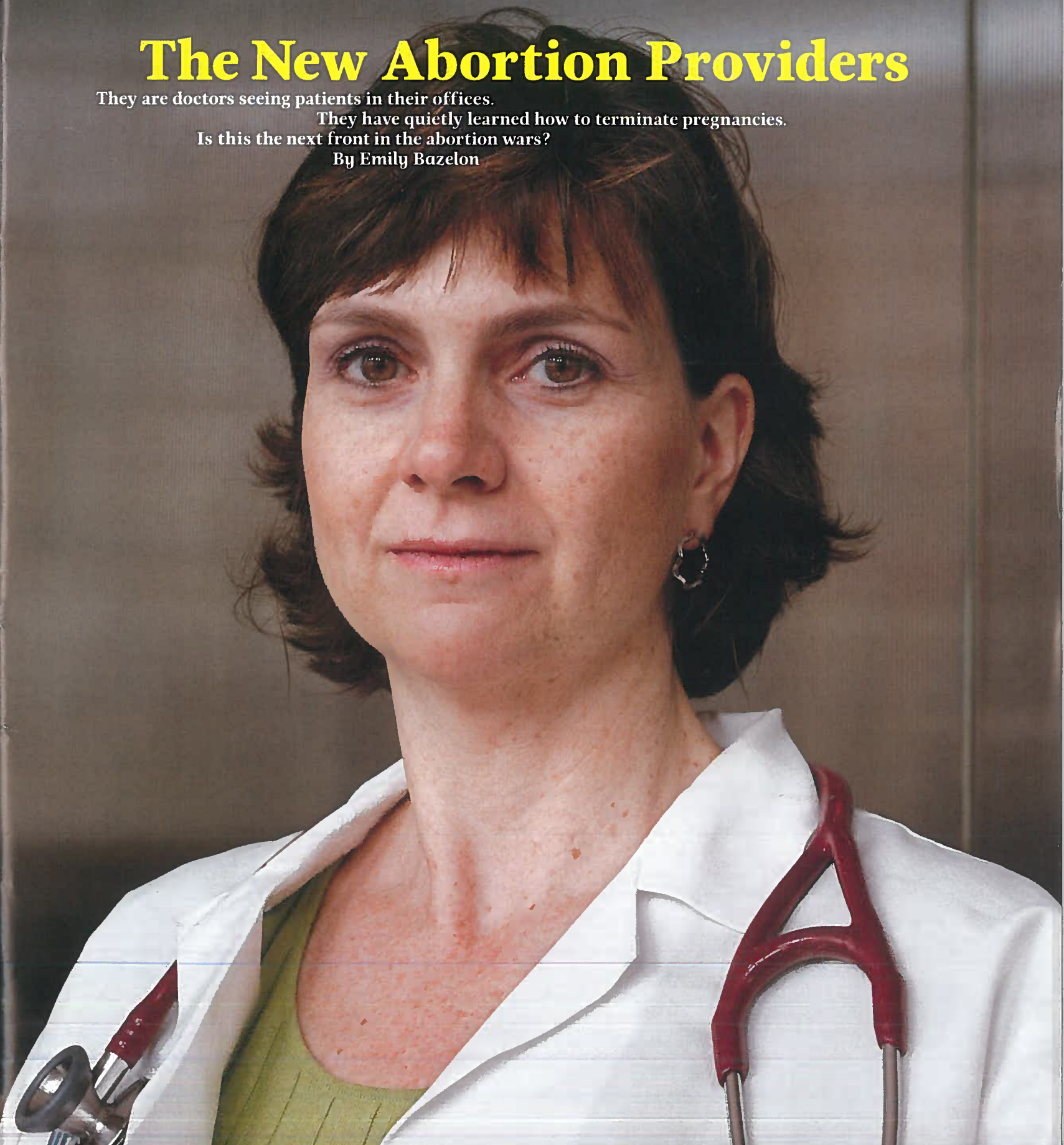
## The New Abortion Providers

They are doctors seeing patients in their offices.

They have quietly learned how to terminate pregnancies.

Is this the next front in the abortion wars?

By Emily Bazelon





## LIVES: STRANGERS ON A TRAIN

An unexpected companion on an overnight trip through Russia.

BY MARCIA DESANCTIS

**When I travel alone**, my preference is to keep it that way. I'm not really one for chatting people up in hotel bars or for reeling out my anecdotes or listening to theirs. Which is why my heart sank, a few weeks ago, when a man entered my chamber just as the overnight train from Moscow to St. Petersburg departed the station.

I thought I had reserved both beds in the first-class compartment. The purpose of my voyage, after all, was contemplation. I spent much of my 20s in Russia back when it was the Soviet Union and traveled this route countless times. I always loved to head north in the nighttime, across the Volga River, toward the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea. But I hadn't been back for a couple of decades, and I wanted to reflect in solitude.

I unpacked a nightie and kicked off my flats. It was 10:30 and hot. Just then, the man walked in. He looked at me with what was surely a reflection of my own expression, which said roughly, "This isn't happening."

"I don't think this is your room," I said. I looked at the other bunk. It was a foot from mine. I stood, and together we examined his ticket, then the number on the door, and finally each other.

No, I thought. No, no, no. He was six and a half feet tall, red face, shaved head, wearing a garish warm-up jacket. I guessed he grunted or worse in his sleep. My night passage, my meditation on where all those years had gone, my sentimental journey: all dead on arrival.

We pattered about awkwardly. I stuck my nightie under the pillow. He checked his phone, and then we sat and looked at each other. He had a kind face.

"I'm Marcia," I said.

"I'm Igor," he said. No kidding, I thought. He was from Vladivostok.

"Do you have a family?" I asked, but I misspoke, using the word *familiya*, which means "surname," instead of *sem'ya*, which means "family."

"Ummm. ..." He looked slightly flustered.

"I mean, a family," I said, correcting myself.

"Yes!" he said. On his phone he showed me a shot of his wife and kids, tall and smiling — a girl, 12, and a boy, 15. Just like I have.

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*Marcia DeSanctis, a writer in Connecticut, is working on a memoir.*

So I fired up my laptop and showed him my own tall, smiling son and daughter.

Our dinner came. He ordered water, not beer, to drink. I was relieved and, I confess, surprised. Our dishes were crammed on the tiny, shared table. We chatted about our kids, sports, work, travel. He had taken an eight-hour plane ride from Vladivostok that morning. Igor was exactly as far from home as I was.

"I'll let you change," he said. He stepped out of the compartment and closed the door. The nightie was a tad inappropriate, considering, so I dug out some sweatpants and a tank top. Igor returned in his version of pajamas — basketball shorts and a T-shirt — and shut the door behind him.

"It's better to lock it," he said, turning the bolt. A polite look passed over his face, which soothed the panicked one on mine. I thought of my husband, who at that moment was probably picking up our daughter from school in Connecticut.

"Nudge me if I snore," he said, covering himself with his sheet and blanket.

"Oh, I know the drill. Good night."

"Good night. Sleep well."

I didn't get much shut-eye that night. There were the intermittent squeals of drunks somewhere nearby, the wide-awake children, a man who paced the corridor talking on the phone or to himself. It being June, darkness never fell, and even though our blinds were drawn, the compartment was bathed in half-light. Igor's breathing was not loud, but present, rhythmic and safe.

In the morning, when the attendant came to rouse us, I jumped to unlock the door. She brought bread and tea, and we stirred in sugar for longer than was necessary.

"Let's open the curtains," he said. "It's beautiful."

Condensation glazed the windows. Outside, a million birch trees stood deep and wide along the train tracks. We sped past them, through the Russian forest.

"Did you sleep well?" he asked.

"Yes," I lied. "Very."

In St. Petersburg, Igor held me as I negotiated the chasm between the train and the platform. I greeted a driver from my hotel and handed over my bags. I turned with my arms half open, to say goodbye to Igor. But he was already gone, disappeared into the crowd. ♦

ILLUSTRATION BY HOLLY WALES

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