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Sick Again

Kristina Zaremba

The amber toned light inside the womb creates an eighteen hour sunset for the fetus who is now fully formed, and still covered in downy lanugo. Of her limited senses, hearing is the most developed. Every human voice sounds softer filtered through skin, fat, and the thick swollen tissues of a pregnant woman. But these serve only as background noise to the quick flushing of blood, the gurgle and strain of intestines, and the hushed breaths of deep pink lungs.

Sometimes the mother is singing. She sings the same songs over and over with the car radio: Queen, David Bowie, and Led Zeppelin. The fetus can recognize a familiar song and the voice singing it. Both of them like Led Zeppelin best.

The fetus sleeps all night and most of the day. Sometimes it wakes up to the mother running. She goes bounding across rooms and hallways to the nearest bathroom because she still has bad morning sickness. That happens to some women; they may have it until the day they deliver, but her doctor thinks it will stop soon since its down to once a week now. The mother hates the sensation of vomiting--throat muscles resisting stomach muscles, a digestive paste rising and her trying to re-swallow it, but giving up soon when persistent spasms force it back up.

Sometimes the fetus wakes up to the sound of the mother, Elaine, slamming down the receiver of the phone and crying. This usually happens after conversations with the fetus' grandmother, Vivian. Elaine is still young and argues a lot with her parents, but most often with her mother. That's why she lives with her father who divorced Vivian for similar reasons three years ago. The fetus, who does not have a name yet, feels uncomfortable when Elaine cries, and tries to fall asleep but is kept up by abrupt hard sobs.

When the fetus is awake, she moves around a lot. Instead of inviting strangers and relatives who are like strangers to "feel the baby kick," Elaine gets panicky. She worries that the fetus will work the umbilical cord around her neck, cut off her oxygen supply, and be born with brain damage or dead. This never happens, though, and Elaine feels the fetus moving again a few hours later. The fetus is only vaguely aware of the umbilical cord.

When Elaine gets upset or frightened her body releases stress hormones to both her and the fetus. Overexposure to stress hormones for a prolonged period of time can fatigue the mother and impact the development of the fetus. The fetus is already slightly underweight for her age.

Elaine does not know that she was originally going to have identical twins, but the other fetus was miscarried and reabsorbed into her uterus after only 47 days. This Vanishing Twin Syndrome is more common than most people think; 1 in 8 pregnancies begin with twins, but only 1 in 70 carry them full term. While Elaine was driving anxiously around the parking lots of abortion clinics, one fetus was pragmatically terminated. Regardless, Elaine sat idling outside the clinics well into her fourth month, but every time she stayed in the car and sang with the radio instead, and debated over whether Robert Plant or David Bowie would make a better father.