

And Now There Were Six

By Reem Abdel Hameid

I walk in the room and she's lying in bed. For a second she looks comfortable but then she does not. She smiles at me and I at her. I notice him standing next to her. I ask if this is their first.

I watch as they prepare. They help her into position. He stands next to her bed with one hand on her shoulder. I stand behind the seated obstetrician wearing a blue sterile gown and beige latex gloves. On the blue sterile table next to the obstetrician, I notice an array of equipment — twelve versions of the same type of sterile scissors. I take a deep breath in. The midwife makes a joke. Someone laughs.

Me, the blue obstetrician, the midwife, him and her. They explain to her that she will need to push with each contraction. She nods. She is ready. Everyone is ready.

The first contraction comes and goes. I feel small.

With every contraction, the cheerful crowd of three erupts. I hear every variation of "push!" But I only watch in silence. I am not here to play the game; I stand on the sidelines.

The blue obstetrician runs out of gel and asks for my help. I trust my frightened hands to tear three packets of gel. I squeeze some gel directly onto the blue table.

The midwife tells her to relax between contractions. And she does. I realize I have been clenching my jaw for the past ten minutes. I relax, too.

In the contraction that follows, I pay attention to the crowd: the obstetrician, the midwife and him. The obstetrician seated at the end of the bed. The midwife and him on either sides, each of them placing their hand on one shoulder. All three of them encouraging her in their own individual, beautiful ways.

I think about a mother's love. And I see it when she pushes. And I feel its strength, and her strength, and my mother's strength. Now I know what love is.

The obstetrician tells her the head is in view now. He helps her sip water. They tell us the name. I think the name is lovely.

The final two. After the penultimate contraction, she's uncomfortable.

The final one.

In the gloved hands that are no longer beige, I witness the beginning of the human condition. Or is it the pinnacle?

I hear the cry humans make in their first few seconds on Earth, and I realize, I, am crying too.

I look at her, him, the midwife and the obstetrician. For so long there were five of us in that room. And now there were six.

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