



Source: Michael Slackman, 'Mubarak adds Western touch to election bid', *New York Times in International Herald Tribune online*, 29/07/05

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It had been a difficult few months, well, nine months actually. Everyone had said that it would get better after the first three months, that she was not going to be so sick, or grumpy. Moody, his mother called it, but for him she was grumpy, just plain grumpy and he didn't like it, it felt wrong, all wrong. He had heard stories of women completely freaking out while giving birth, screaming at their husbands, hating them, calling them names, and he didn't think that he was really ready for that.

He wanted her back. He wanted his lovely wife back.

He was scared of who she had become and what he was going to feel like if that person, that weird, aggressive, huge, grumpy person didn't disappear after the baby was born, but stayed on. He had visions of himself shrinking, his thin frame disappearing altogether until he became a shadow in his own house, slinking down the hallways, flattening himself against the walls when she sailed past with her huge energy and her huge belly and her huge pram and all the things that seemed to have become so huge lately. It seemed like he was just necessary to provide the money and, occasionally, the semen; although recently he had been denied even that.

And so he had been a little relieved actually when the doctors had decreed that her placenta was positioned such that it was going to be difficult and potentially dangerous to have a vaginal birth and that she would have to have a Caesarean, because then they were avoiding that other, final hugeness, the hugeness of the drama of birth, which, with the hugeness of everything else he had started to get very scared about.

He had really tried to be patient, had tried to maintain some sort of calm, at least on the outside, had even done a little bit of yoga in the office before leaving work, just to prepare himself for all the stuff he was going to get when he got home. He had even tried walking home from the city, rather than catching the tram, but got in trouble for that as well. Where had he been? she said, what had he been doing? why was he walking home from the city? if he wanted to go for a walk why didn't he go with her? take her out for a walk? didn't he want to be seen with her? didn't he want to spend time with her? didn't he think that she wanted to see something other than the four walls of their house inside which she had been imprisoned? That sort of trouble.

He wanted her back, his lovely wife. He was exhausted. And scared.

Finally, the day approached. They were due to have the Caesarean at 2.30 on Monday afternoon, and the tension had mounted to ridiculous levels over the weekend.

Virtually every moment had been taken up with seeing various members of both families, with the accompanying exchanges of gifts and advice. And it wasn't just the women who handed out the advice. That was when he heard about the cursing, over the barbecue on Saturday lunchtime. Then the whole of Monday had been a nightmare with the hysteria and the tears starting at five o'clock in the morning when she thought that her waters had broken overnight and in fact they hadn't at all but anyway even if they had the midwife said that it would be okay for them to come in at the appointed time, and then she went through, for the third time, her mountainous list of instructions. What he was supposed to do when she was in hospital; how he was supposed to shop and clean and cook and run the house. He just sat there battling a vision of pizza, beer and chocolate ice cream.

And so, at last, nine months and three days later, it was 2.30 p.m., and there they were in the operating theatre, all scrubbed up and ready; he with the camera and the new memory stick at the ready. He felt very strange and so terribly small now, almost as if without the camera no-one would have been able to see him at all.

And then there was the anaesthetic and then the green sheet, to shield her from the cutting, and then they did cut her and then he could see the head of their little one coming through the cut in his wife's flesh, and then there was the angling of the little one's head to get it through the gap, gently moving the baby to and fro and then he saw her whole body and saw that she was a she and saw her there before him, so tiny, so delicate, and then, finally, she opened her mouth and she screamed.

He stood there and gazed. Time stopped. She screamed and screamed, and as she screamed inside himself he felt it happen, something new and strange. Two split into three, and as that happened, he became huge, an enormous space opened up inside him. It got wider and wider and wider, spreading in him, through him and out, right out into the world. He stood and watched her scream, this new beautiful creature, their darling, and felt himself spread; spreading as he took her in his arms, as he smelt her, as he held her to his chest, as he gave her to his wife, as, later, he watched her in her crib. It was a vast, vast space.

And you know, it never closed up. It eased back in a little over the years of course, through all the ups and downs of his continued existence with his wife and continually expanding family, but it never really left him. He was changed, in that moment, forever.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Caroline Lee.*