



Source: AP, Reuters, 'Israelis revel in all things Leo', *The Australian online*, 14/03/07.

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The French say that in a couple there is always one who kisses and one who offers the cheek. Libby was of the latter type—but she was always so gracious in the act of offering that it felt like an honour to adore her. Rachel, Libby's twin, adored her sister—yet as a young girl, she had bathed Libby's Barbies in the toilet, scribbled on the wall by her bed, cut off her braids while she was sleeping. Libby had taken it all on her trembling little chin at the time. She knew to be patient with Rachel. Rachel was younger.

People will always ask twins: 'Who was born first?' But if you look closely, you can tell. It's the one who holds your gaze a second or two longer, the one who stands a little taller, even if, technically, they're the same height.

Rachel was ecstatic when she found out she was pregnant. She was triumphant. She was first. Before even calling her husband, Kieran, she got onto the phone to Libby.

'Oh Rachel...', Libby said.

'I know. It's amazing, isn't it?'

Rachel relished this rare opportunity to be magnanimous.

'I hope it happens for you two soon.'

Libby remained silent and Rachel felt awkward. She rested the pink stick down on the telephone table, then covered it over with the torn envelope from a bill. Libby eventually responded in a tone that put Rachel back in the junior position.

'Rachel. You know you're not supposed to tell people until at least twelve weeks.'

Exactly four weeks later, as everyone picked at scraps from Sunday dinner, Libby stood up and made the announcement: *we're having a baby*. When she sat down again, her husband, Leonard, leaned over and rested his hand on her belly. Rachel noticed it already formed a slight curve beneath her dress. Everyone at the table beamed from twin to twin.

'How far gone are you, Darling?' asked the twins' mother.

'Twelve weeks,' said Libby, glancing over at Rachel.

Rachel and Kieran excused themselves early that day.

For the first two trimesters of her pregnancy, Rachel watched her bump grow, surprised that her joy in being pregnant was always checked by her melancholy that Libby got there first. Then just after seven months, her baby lodged itself in breech position and refused to budge. Her blood pressure was worryingly high too, and the doctors set a date for a Caesarian—three days before Libby's due date, not too soon for the baby to be premature, but soon enough for it to be first. Rachel was thrilled.

The morning of Rachel's Caesarian, Libby and Kieran accompanied her to the hospital. As Kieran joked and chattered, Libby put on a CD that she'd prepared for her own delivery. Abba chimed out *Mamma Mia* and Kieran fell about laughing. Rachel smiled, torn between thoughts of how perfect and fun this gesture was and how annoying that she hadn't arranged her own special details.

As the nurse came in to prep Rachel, Libby sat in the visitor's chair, lips pursed, deep in concentration, letting out the occasional gasp between clenched teeth.

'You alright?' asked Kieran.

Libby winced.

'I didn't think anything of it at first, but these contractions

are getting seriously close.'

For the next five minutes, the nurse sat with Libby, holding her hand and counting the seconds as three contractions washed over her.

'Better get you a room.'

Libby raised an eyebrow to her sister as she waddled out slowly with Kieran and the nurse each taking an arm. When her husband returned, Rachel was pacing, red in the face, eyes small and shiny.

'Unbelievable. Unbelievable.'

'Not this again,' said Kieran. 'Not today.'

Rachel stared over at him, defying Kieran to hold her gaze.

'I'd better check up on her until Leonard gets here,' he said, looking away.

Alone, Rachel practiced the breathing exercises she's learned in ante-natal classes. I suppose they weren't entirely useless, she thought. Kieran returned several minutes later.

'How far gone is she now? How long did they say it would take?'

Kieran eyed her for a moment before answering.

'9cm.'

'Shit!'

'You two are going to need each other, when the babies are here,' said Kieran. 'This stuff shouldn't matter.'

Rachel frowned.

Fifteen minutes later, Rachel sent Kieran to check up on Libby again.

'Just don't be long.'

He ran down the stairs and back up again.

'No change.'

The next breathless update came an hour later from Leonard, who had arrived just in time to see his firstborn come into the world. A girl. His eyes flashed. He seemed to emanate a whole new energy as he broke the news.

Rachel felt a wave of happiness for her twin sister; she didn't want to fight things any more; this was just how it was with them. The nurse returned to wheel Rachel to surgery. Now she wished Libby could be with her.

Rachel felt like her womb was a drawer, and the surgeon was rummaging for socks. The Caesarian went without a hitch. When Rachel saw her baby—a boy—she cried. After holding his wife's hand as she was stitched back together, Kieran left Rachel to doze. He strode through the hallway, high on new fatherhood, to share the good news downstairs.

A few hours later, Rachel awoke with Kieran by her bedside, his eyes spilling with tears.

'What?' she asked, in a panic. She looked over to the crib where her son slept soundly.

Kieran took her hand and explained about Libby's child, the second baby, the one they hadn't known was there. The second child was stillborn, almost thirty minutes after her sister.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Tessa Wallace.*