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Je ne regrette rien

by Ivor John

“Did you hear that? Rachel did you hear it?”

Although trying not to show it, making every effort to appear unconcerned. Her panic was obvious even with the mask covering her face. The young midwife clearly had thought something was wrong. That time it wasn't just her inexperience. Her lack of finesse with the equipment. She looked to be young, not a teenager perhaps but certainly early twenties. She took an antiseptic wipe from a tub on her trolley and wiped the Doppler, which she had been running across my abdomen before hooking it back into the clip.

I had probably heard it. I thought I had heard it. But I there was so much noise, unusual sounds, which could only cause me more concern. Various blips and bleeps came from the panel of meters on the small trolley, which she had pushed up beside the examination couch. Other than that, the examination room was silent.

Paul, my partner of nearly twenty years, had been phoned and apparently he would be on his way, as soon as he could get cover at work. We had met when we were both undergraduates at Reading University. We had a year apart while I did a year of my economics degree in Geneva on an Erasmus program. Apart from that difficult time, we had been together ever since. I think I love Paul I couldn't imagine being without him, that is the test, isn't it?

We had our difficult times of course. But we had thought about it carefully and decided that it would be right to have a child. I hoped a little girl whom I could dress up in pretty clothes, do her hair and play games with her in the park. I had imagined every moment of the amazing times we would have together. I would call her Deborah. Deborah, my mum had told me, was what she named my little sister, whom she had miscarried. My little sister whom in my mind I had loved, but who had never lived. Had never lived independently.

Paul and I had tried so hard to have a child. I know that people would snigger when I left work early, having checked the calendar, to rush home to have sex. I had made the mistake of having discussed perhaps too openly with a colleague, the process. Taking my temperature and checking the dates. All to predict the optimum time. I had read endlessly in magazines, and it was true, making love had long since ceased to be the pleasure, which it had been in our halcyon college days. Listening to Janis Ian in my bedsit, while we drank wine we bought from the supermarket and making love.

The ineffable pleasure, which then seemed exciting, transgressive. We had been careless, we were children really, I was nineteen. It had hardly been a decision, that I would have 'a termination'. That was the term the nurse at the clinic had used, 'a termination'. The receptionist had said, 'You've come for the procedure'. These euphemisms, bland expressions for killing our baby. Stopping a life, before it had begun. Then in the evening, a Chinese meal, egg fu yung and sweet and sour prawns. To cheer ourselves up.

I had thought about that decision every single day after. I knew that I would do so for the rest of my life. I knew I would always have regret. Was that why I couldn't fall pregnant now? It had happened by mistake then. Effortless. Was it my fault? Were the years of tests, making love to a schedule, providing samples, because of my youthful selfish nonchalance.

Here, now I had been rushed to the maternity Out Patients unit in an ambulance, with stomach pains. Listening to the beeps of machines, which will decide if my child, Deborah, is still alive.