

The Music Box by laurelindoriath

Sunlight filtered through the window and draped across the bed. Dawn tickled at the eyes of a truly exhausted woman, and she instinctively buried her face more into her pillow, pulling the sheets up further. Minutes of the gentle morning rays eventually warmed her into submission. The bulky mound under the blankets began to stir and moan, protesting the all-too-soon arrival of late morning.

She sloughed the blankets off her and lay there, eyes open, in the best of what she could call "pajamas" anymore. Sleeping-in was understood given her state: gestating children took energy, after all; three at once can take a lot out of a mere flesh-based incubator. But an additional factor motivated her to procrastinate, and more so with each day.

Finally, she conceded, reaching up to the strap hanging on a support above her bed. She hauled herself up to a sitting position with what precious remaining dignity she could muster, and shifted her legs over the edge of the height-adjusted bed. She steeled her resolve and with a resigned and miserable groan, heaved herself onto her feet.

The motion was done so with a bit too much gusto, and she ended up bouncing herself right back into her bed. Her moan trickled down into a wimper as she tried in vain to reach the spot on her poor belly which had just punched the plaster-on-lath. She compromised by rubbing the overpacked dome, consoling its occupants.

"Do I really reach the wall now?" she wondered aloud. She sorely stood back up on her feet, and sure enough, the tip of her popped-out navel *just* brushed against it. She knew she was getting close, but perhaps a growth spurt during the night had slammed that gap shut. More care would need to be taken going forward.

She began her day, and after struggling with the morning bathroom necessities she pondered through the living room and past the dining table into the kitchen. Her eyes glanced to the wall at the calendar.

The business-half was torn off, and in a frightening manner which had left scratches on the wallpaper. Only "Marc-" could be made out, and the tips of what looked like "202-" remained beneath a seasonal, stereotypical, gaudy picture of a shamrock.

Time slowed to a crawl. White noise filled her ears and her vision went grayscale. Intense nausea began turning her stomach. Her heartbeat, heavy and frantic, pried through the static, becoming rapidly louder and faster until it pounded her hearing. A ringing began and swelled over the heartbeat and the static, washing everything else out, as her vision began fading oddly to white. Then an electric squeal above the ringing as she felt her stomach heave, falling to the ground in slow motion.

One blink later, it all disappeared. There was no calendar on the wall, and the wallpaper was undamaged. The world was back to a colorful, beautiful, late spring morning. A soft, gentle song chimed through her head, as though someone had wound a music box in the other room. The beautiful scent of the floral garden washed over her as the breeze tickled the drapes. Had that window been open? No matter. She felt at-ease again, and went to the fridge to grab some yogurt for her granola. A snack, of course, while she prepared the main of her breakfast.

Maneuvering had become quite difficult for her, having to reach over and under her distressingly large belly. Standing close to anything in front of her had become nigh impossible with her belly jutting over a foot and a half out from her ribcage and hips. If she wasn't already, she was certainly approaching the point where she would be bigger around than she was tall.

Munching on her granola, she stood with the range to her side. Two burners were hot, frying up a breakfast large enough to feed two, maybe even three fully-grown men. Reaching across herself to tend to the pans was awkward and the fatigue from having to do so much at arms length frustrated her. Breakfast was prepared, and based on the increasingly long and loud protests from her stomach, it was doubtful that any of it would have a chance to get lukewarm.

Carrying two pans made her waddle far more intensely, with no hands to support or stabilize her unbelievable womb, which exploded far beyond her hips, from swaying profoundly. Every step was deliberate and calculated, sometimes with a pause to allow the sheer mass to settle its oscillation. Simply holding such a large and heavy orb from moving like that when her hands were free ought to have built up strength in her arms and core over the past several weeks; but it would seem her brood was very selfish, sucking up every spare nutrient available to bloat themselves alarmingly fatter.

A brutal kick smashed into her ribs. The kick should never have been that strong, given the limited and cramped space, and especially since triplets typically carried smaller birth weights. Wind rushed out of her lungs with a painful yelp and her knees started to buckle. The world flushed monochrome again, and a lot sharper, almost crackling at the edges, hurting her eyes, and she heard the electric buzzing again. The pans clattered on the floor, along with her precious breakfast. Her hands immediately cradled her belly to slow and stabilize herself, and after coming to a stop, the tears started streaming down her face.

She wept as gently as she could, even as she felt a horrid scream trying to escape, but the pain in her ribs was too much. She fought to control herself from breathing too deep and she grew light-headed. The buzzing in her ears drifted away into sobbing, yelling, and screaming, all echoing in her own frantic voice, and her eyes squeezed shut.

"They're too big!" "I can't take it anymore"
"Just cut them OUT of me already!"
"They won't fit!" "Why are you letting this happen?"
"Do something, please!" "GET THEM OUT! GET THEM OUT OF ME!"

Her teeth clenched and she started hyperventilating, and in pain and fear, her fingers clutched her belly so fiercely that her nails starting drawing blood. The world started growing white again, and ringing drowned out the cries.

Another flash of static.

She was sitting at the dining table, sideways, with most of breakfast finished. A plate was resting completely stable on her absolute shelf of an abdomen. She remembered when placing a plate there would be wobbly and she wouldn't be able to cut anything without it shifting. Now she was so massive that she truly could treat the top of her belly like a table, provided none of her frighteningly overgrown, overdu-

She banished the thought with another bite of sausage. The beautiful chimes of the music box filled her ears with a comforting and familiar lullaby, and the fresh scent of the flowers, this time from the front garden, along with fresh-cut grass came in through the bay windows, and she basked in the warm sun coming through.

With great effort, she stood up and cleared the table. While she was carrying the pans and dishes to the kitchen, her fork dropped off and clattered to the floor. A fury flushed over her face, and all the pent-up rage and anguish over her condition, her FORCED condition, her *wretched* condition flew into the sudden kick at the offensive utensil. The flatware flew up off the floor, smashing into the bottom of the door window, sending a spiteful crack up through it.

Settling her breathing, she turned into the kitchen, noticing her appointment for May 9th. That was her final checkup of course, before she was induced. All she needed to do was get to 34 weeks, they said...

May 9, 2023.

She threw the pans and dishes into the sink and collapsed over it sobbing. The gentle chimes of the music box started distorting, warping into a sickening tune, slowing to haunted pace. The white-noise static blinked several times in front of her vision, switching between black and white scenes of hospital rooms and clinics, masked faces and blinding lights, strange syringes and IVs.

Her rage and anguish built, brute-forcing her mind back into her kitchen. The music box was all out of tune now, and the grey world pulsed crimson at the every edge. She shoved herself up from the sink with astounding strength, stalked over to the calendar and ripped the bottom half off, even tearing the wallpaper underneath. She looked down, satisfied with the destruction she had wrought, and examined her prize.

March 2024.

18 months. It had been 18 months.

The color returned to her vision and the music box returned to normal. She dropped the calendar and slowly wandered, devoid of any emotion, as though in a trance, to the living room, where she sat heavily on the recliner. She knew she had to prepare herself in as comfortable a place as possible.

A few minutes later, the pain began, and a subtle-yet-growing burning and pinching rippled over the too-tight skin on her overtaxed belly. Her heart pounded in her chest and her belly throbbed ominously. Her children were finally getting into their breakfast. She could feel herself stretching bigger, something that shouldn't even be possible at this point. Her hips screamed, her bruised rib yelped, and she tried in vain to take only short, shallow breaths, but eventually she broke down and started gasping and crying as she literally felt herself swell ever-so-terrifyingly closer to the point of popping.

And everyone knows children grow fastest in the first year.