

Baby Fish Mouth

by Steven J. Kolbe

“Lunge to your right,” the woman on the screen instructs. She is easily six-months pregnant but still looks fit and healthy. “Now show off your baby.” She centers herself, splays her arms, and thrusts her belly out towards us. “Lunge to the left. Now show off your baby. To the right. Show off your baby.”

“I don't think I'm doing it right,” I tell Susan. As of this week she is seventeen weeks pregnant and just starting to show. “My baby doesn't look anything like hers,” I complain about the woman on the TV.

“That's because your baby's over *here*.” She pats her abdomen.

“My baby? You ate my baby?”

“Ewww,” she grimaces.

Next, we pick our weights off the floor.

“Lift your baby off the ground and hold it to your chest. Now present baby to a friend.” We hold our weights out in front of us like an offering to the altar. “Pull baby close. Now present baby to a friend who's taller than you.” Now we hold our baby out and up like an offering to God.

After we've done everything we can with our imaginary dumbbell babies, we cool down with a stretch.

“Be sure to make room for baby,” the instructor reminds us.

“Are you ready to make room for baby?” Susan asks me, glancing around our tiny basement apartment.

Next, we sit on our carpeted living room floor and stare off into space. I'm not ready to admit that an exercise video meant for women in their second trimester has left me winded, so I just sit quietly.

“I think I feel her,” Susan says, standing up. She places her fingertips, soft but firm, just below her stomach. Lately she's been

desperate to feel *something*, so I don't respond immediately. But then she stands there for a full minute, and we give either our baby or her small intestine our full attention.

"What's it feel like? Fluttery?" This is the word I've read about.

"Not *fluttery*. It's more like . . . carbonation. Like she's a little fish."

"Like he's swimming around in there?" We haven't found out the gender yet. To avoid the ear-grating "his or her," "he or she," and "him or her," I've switched to the generic "he" and Susan to the generic "she." Occasionally, I'll say "they" and someone will respond, "Oh really?" (Whatever happened to the singular *they*? That's what I'd like to know!) So we haven't found out and we won't find out. I mean, we will *eventually*, but not before eventually.

"No, it's like she's blowing bubbles in the water."

"Well, he is breathing amniotic fluids by now."

"Like a fish," she says.

"Like a fish," I repeat.

Neither of us take our eyes off her belly.

I imagine our little guy *or girl*—woken up by their mother's pregnancy Pilates—doing their own little womb workout. I picture them doing backflips and somersaults, their two tiny fists sucker punching the wall of Susan's uterus like it's a speed bag.

"Are you in there, little fishy?" she asks, craning her ear toward her belly as if expecting a reply.

"Just a few more months," I say, suddenly winded in a brand new way.

