



Cocoon

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When the cramping started over a month early, I figured it was just false labor. After all, your father and I had already spent hours discussing how we would handle delivering a baby in the peak of a pandemic. As a family physician closely monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic, I estimated your birthday would almost surely coincide with the peak of cases. My students were already relegated to self-study to save our precious PPE. I had stopped seeing patients in the hospital, offering only virtual visits for my clinic patients. Would we be able to safely walk through the hospital to labor and delivery? We had already started to call birth centers in case the hospital was too full to accommodate us. Your 19-month-old sister surely would not be allowed to visit, so how would we make sure she had someone to care for her while we were at the hospital for a couple of days? We had started a call schedule for family members. Perhaps in the worst case, what if you father wasn't allowed to support me in labor? Could we FaceTime? Would he be allowed outside the delivery room to hear your first cry?

But you had other plans, anyway. As the cramping intensified and it was clear you were making an early arrival, we made it to the hospital

with minutes to spare. As the midwife delivered you from my womb into my arms, I wrapped the blanket tightly around you to keep you safe and warm. In the days that followed, you did not know any other world. You did not know that the sterile, gloved hands of your nurses at every touch and the masked smiles offering you comfort were new for us, too. You didn't notice the absence of nursing students checking your oxygen levels and adjusting your telemetry, nor the medical students trailing behind the attending physician, learning to examine your small body. You never knew to miss your sister running down the hall to meet her new little brother in the recovery room, holding you for the first time in a hospital bed, or gazing wide-eyed into your clear, plastic bassinet. You never knew how quiet those first days felt for your dad and me, no visitors other than food service and twice-daily nurses seeing how we were doing. Your dad and I joked that we went to the hospital to have a date night, eating the first food we shared outside our home in over a month.

We returned home, and your sister waited excitedly by the door with my parents. Rushing to the couch to gaze at this new doll who made new noises and moved in strange ways.

Immediately she thrust out her arms wrapping you in them, and kissing your head. She of course did not remember her own first days home from the hospital. After her birth, friends and family visited in a seemingly constant stream, bringing blankets and swaddles to cocoon her in new colors and textures. After her birth, colleagues brought extra hospital pacifiers, without a worry that they could be contaminating our home. But you were content with the same familiar voices, the same warm hands transferring you from bassinet to the same welcoming arms. The cocoon we built for you was smaller, tighter, and safer than we imagined.

When we went for walks, venturing out for the first time as a family of four, no one stopped to peer into your bassinet, knowing the danger they could bring. We kept your stroller covered as we covered our faces. One day, my sweet son, you will see just how much the world has to offer. You will experience the generosity and kindness of strangers, you will venture out to a restaurant with your parents and sister, and you will meet an extensive and expansive network of family members who can't wait to meet you. You

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will live in a world of equality, where you can breathe easily both indoors and outside. Where we can host my mentees around our dinner table and show them how both family and career are not only possible, but symbiotic. Where my patients will see my full face in clinic, and not worry they might be sending something dangerous home to you. Where I do

not worry daily about the mental health of my students, learning the art and science of medicine through a virtual platform. In the meantime, we will keep you safe and warm in the arms of your parents, grandparents, and sister, wrapping you tightly until you and our country are able to spread your wings.

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