

## The Rocking Chair

She was the most beautiful baby in the world. So quiet, so peaceful. Her little girl. She was wrapped up in a soft, yellow towel with Winnie the Pooh patterns on the corners, not long out of the bath. She would get her dressed soon, but right now she just wanted to cuddle her, protect her from the world and kiss her soft cheeks. Her hand was stroking the little girl's hair, she had been born with a full head of hair, and it had just continued to grow since, except for the little bald spot at the back of her head that had been rubbing against the bed when she slept. She put the little baby, still bundled up in her towel, against her shoulder and started rocking slowly in the chair, singing quietly to the baby as she stroked her back as if she was comforting the already sleeping little angel. The child didn't move a muscle, and tears started to fall from the eyes of the young mother.

The birth of your first born should be the happiest day of your life, especially when you have been looking forward to it for nine months. The nursery has been decorated with extreme care, the pram, the cot and everything had been carefully selected for the baby's comfort, and to please the parents' eyes. Once the big day comes along things never go according to plan. The hospital bag wasn't already packed, once at the hospital the wishes for a natural birth were replaced with screams for epidural and medications, then after all that you've been told they have to perform an emergency caesarean because the baby's heartbeat shows distress. After the operation you lay there with a child in your arms. She's so beautiful, she will drink her milk when offered and seems as content as a baby could be. She feels like a stranger though. You didn't give birth to her; she was just taken from you forcefully by the surgeons. Now this supposed little bundle of joy is resting against your chest and all you feel is cold, like it's a stranger forcing themselves on you, living off your warmth.

Then the day comes when you leave the hospital. You let your husband carry the baby in its brand new car seat. You have no interest in helping; you're supposed to take it easy anyhow, as you have only a few days ago gone through major surgery. You wave goodbye to the nurses and midwives you pass, forcing a smile that you don't mean, but they won't know any different as each day people come and go and they rarely know their names, or sometimes even their faces. The car ride back home is done in silence, you let your husband drive and chat away as you sit next to your little baby, aimlessly staring at something that still looks so foreign to you, despite you having been told that you will get used to it, it will just take a few days, it often does when you've not been able to deliver your baby naturally. So you believe them, you smile and agree to their questions. They're the professionals after all, they should know if something, or if anything is wrong. Then they send you home, and there is no one there to tell you things will change, that it will be O.K. You're completely alone.

Weeks pass and as your husband goes back to work you're left alone at home with your little girl. You accept her as yours now, and you do love her. You love how when you take her for walks, people you don't even know tell you how beautiful she is and you're glowing with pride. Then you go back home and she starts crying. She won't drink her milk and she doesn't need a change of nappy. She doesn't seem to want to burp or have

gas, and you don't know what to do. You put her down and run out of the room, leaving the little angel by herself as you stand staring at a picture of you and your husband before she was born. When it was just the two of you and you were happy, when you weren't arguing and you didn't feel like he hated you and only had eyes for her.

Then the guilt comes... you take her in your arms and sit down in the rocking chair you often sit in when you attempt to feed her. Rocking slowly back and forth as you sing the same lullabies you sing every evening and every night when she refuses to sleep. Your voice sounds more like hoarse whispers than melody through the tears. The baby crying too as she can sense that you're not happy and you feel more and more guilty to the point where there is no way of controlling yourself or the tears. Ignoring any knocks on the door, never answering the phone, just sitting there waiting for things to get better, knowing that they won't.

She couldn't wait for her husband to come home and then she could just give him all the responsibilities. He could do dinner, he'd look after the baby, give her, her evening bath. She hated bathing the little girl, she always seemed to cry and scream when she attempted to do it, yet was fine when her husband did. She felt inadequate, useless and at times she didn't even care. She just wanted things to change back to how it used to be. How happy they were.

She didn't think the little girl was healthy, she told her GP, but he didn't believe her. She told her health visitor and she asked her to speak to the GP, although the health visitor herself found nothing wrong. It wasn't right though. She cried all the time, didn't eat a lot, she wasn't happy. She just seemed ill... so ill, and she just wanted to make her feel better.

One night when she had to get up to the little baby, she tried to feed her as usual. She wasn't tired; by now she had pretty much stopped sleeping. She couldn't remember the last time that she had closed her eyes for more than five minutes. She just sat there staring into space waiting for the baby to stop feeding, maybe even go back to sleep. The baby didn't sound right. She was coughing and whining so she put her to her shoulder and tried to make the coughing stop. She rubbed the little angel's back trying to make her better. Once again the wave of incompetence came over her, and she was struggling to breathe as she felt her chest starting to tighten and her thoughts were clouded by uncertainty on what to do to make the baby feel better. She couldn't stop the baby crying, hell she couldn't even stop herself from crying. "Just be fucking quiet!" she felt bad the moment the words left her lips, she hadn't meant to say it. She didn't mean to swear, she just wanted her to feel better. She could feel something wet on her shoulder. Her little angel had been sick, and she had to make her feel better, she needed to make her feel better. She put the baby down in her cot as she went to the bathroom to get water for the baby's bath. She would clean her, and then put her back to bed. She knew now she was right, she had been ill and the doctor was wrong. She would clean her up, and then put her to bed. She needed rest. To get better.

She carefully put her elbow into the bath water making sure it wasn't too warm then took her little angel from her bed where she had already removed her dirty clothes and laid out

a towel at the bottom to put her on when she was wet. "Come on little baby. It's ok. Mummy has you." She gently put her into the bath water, continuing to talk to her as the water surrounded her little body. Soon the crying had stopped. She felt like finally she had done something right. She'd made her happy... stopped her cries.

As she relaxed in the rocking chair, she felt her eyes closing. For the first time since the little angel had been born she felt like she could sleep. She'd stay with her though, keeping her safe, letting her sleep against her shoulder. "I love you Amy" she whispered to the little girl, wrapping a blanket around her as she felt cold. Then she finally drifted off to sleep.