

## The Journey

Right now, the woman is so tired that she can physically feel the heavy air pressing down on her shoulders. She is in her late 20s, but her dull facial expressions and her almost grey skin tone, hunched back, greasy blond hair and droopy T-shirt with food stains on it makes her look a lot older than she really is.

The room she was in looked like a battlefield, only that there were toys, play mats, a walker, high chair and swings instead of blood and dead bodies. The living room was not for 'living' anymore. Everything in there was dedicated to a small, tiny fretful baby. Sometimes, the baby wouldn't stop crying unless he gets to pull out someone's hair. Every time, it was like her scalp was being pulled off, but she couldn't even scream because she did not want the neighbours to hear it. Then after quite a while, when he was not interested in pulling her hair anymore, the baby let her go with the happiest and the creepiest smile she'd ever seen. It brought so much repulsion and shivers that she wished someone else had seen that.

In ignoring the extreme screeching and hysterical cry of the baby, the woman briefly tidies the room just enough so that her husband would not get angry at the state of the house when he comes back. He recently started commenting on how she looks like she had put on some weight. He also said that it is because she is not putting much effort into getting him interested anymore. She was too exhausted to have any energy left to answer him back each time. The crying sounds grow like a siren. It comes in intervals, it spins around and around her head over and over and over and over and over

She cannot take this anymore, she picks the baby up quite violently. Then the crying becomes even more hysterical and high-pitched. She looks into the baby's eyes. *I would do anything right now to make you stop crying*, she thinks in her head. *Anything*. The baby's voice is gone too husky and his breathing sounds somewhat like the growling of an animal. But it continues to cry, and cry even louder and louder. How is this possible? The baby cries maybe because he is hungry, or he needs his nappy changed, or he is tired and needs someone to put him into sleep, or, because he simply needs a hug.

*I'm the one who needs a hug*, she thinks to herself. She couldn't remember when she had her last hug with someone. She hadn't seen her family over in Poland for quite a while. The feeling of isolation and loneliness does not go away like people said that it would after few years. Quite the opposite, as the excitement of starting a new life in Ireland lessens, the nostalgia becomes greater and greater. Of course, everyone's life is troubling. Her sisters were all busy with their own lives and their own kids. Mum's cancer had relapsed last winter. This time, chemotherapy might not actually work on her. It was not just her life that was so bleak and dismal. But in the end, we all only look at our own sufferings and miseries. Sometimes we cannot help but be humans. She just couldn't help but feel uneasy when people called nowadays. The conversation always started with 'How's Kacper', it was very rare for her to get asked how she was

coping.

Kacper desperately tries to get out of her embrace. He tries to reach his little purple pony. The woman picks it up and gives it to Kacper. With Kacper in her arms, she has to bend down, reach the ground and then come all the way back up. After the childbirth, her back hasn't been good so these little tasks became extremely difficult for her. But when she hands it to him, Kacper throws it back to the ground. If she tries to put him down on the ground, he starts to cry. If she doesn't pick up the toy for him immediately, he starts to cry. So she goes and picks up the toy for him again and again until he is satisfied. Sometimes she wondered if Kacper was genuine or if he's simply playing her. Sometimes Kacper looked at her like he was looking at a monkey in the zoo. He couldn't speak a word yet, but she felt as if the baby was telling her, *go ahead, get up and move, bend down, dance, entertain me*. There was something about him that was so purely evil. But people don't see the devil behind the happy smile, peachy cheeks and innocent-looking eyes. She loathes those baby-like features that blind people from seeing the truth. And she even wishes that one day, people would see the true evilness of the baby.

The tired woman looks at the time. It is nearly 9 o'clock and her husband hasn't arrived home yet. He must have got caught at work again. It is time for Kacper to go to sleep, but his eyes do not seem sleepy at all. *Of course* they don't, she thought to herself. The only way to get him to sleep was to take him out for driving. Kacper only slept in his own car seat. The woman picked Kacper up from his high chair and carried him all the way down to the car park. It is a long way down the stairs. She trapped him with the belts, then she pulled her head out and walked to the driver's seat. This small walk to the front seat, for her, was few seconds of liberation. This was the only time she had her own peace and serenity.

The baby starts to whimper, but the mother knows that this is a good sign. It meant that he is tired and ready to go to sleep. As per usual, she drove away from the apartment block, and started driving on the N4. Kacper could only sleep when the car was on the highway. The car gets to the roundabout and comes back out and immerses itself into the streams of cars and then come back again. This is a long car journey that is never headed anywhere.

Finally, at long last, Kacper falls asleep. She nearly falls asleep while driving, as she only slept for about 4 hours last night. However as soon as she realises this, she puts gum in her mouth and opens her eyes as wide as possible. She slowly parked the car. Now was the most important part. She removes all of the safety belts, gets the baby out of the car, holds him to her chest and walks up the stairs very carefully. Until she puts him onto his bed, she does not let the tension go. She sometimes had to make two or more car journeys when Kacper woke up in the middle of the night.

Now, she is sure that Kacper is perfectly asleep and she finally finds herself time to go to the bathroom. In the bathroom, as she washes her hands, she stares at the wrinkles and freckles under her eyes. She does not know when they appeared. Maybe her

husband was right. Even she was disgusted at herself.

She is so deep in her thoughts that she does not notice the entrance of her husband. The entrance that breaks the calmness and serenity she yearned for the whole day.

“Casper!” he shouts. Every time, it puts her off how her Irish husband cannot pronounce Kacper, his son’s name properly. The woman abruptly opened the bathroom door and ran into the bedroom as fast as she could but it was too late. Her husband was already holding up Kacper high, smiling brightly. Unaware, of the fact that if Kacper does not get some sleep now, he will be whimpering all day tomorrow. Unaware, of the fact that she had to drive for 50 minutes to put that baby to sleep. Unaware, of the fact that every time she is on that road, in that roundabout, chewing that gum to wake herself up, she is tempted to just simply let the handle go. Unaware, of the fact that she is actually going *insane* and she is—

Right now, she is so outraged that, for second, she forgets about the heavy air pressing down on her shoulders.