

Excerpt from short story “The Baby” by Karen A. Wyle

Ellie lay in the bed and would not open her eyes.

Once she opened her eyes, it would all begin. She would see the baby, and he would look like her lost Daniel. Daniel as a baby, of course. And she would have Daniel again, as long as they both should live. And she would never have Daniel again, as long as she lived.

She listened, but heard no breathing. There were so many other sounds -- buzzes and hums of equipment, tinny music, wheels of carts, footsteps. A baby's breathing would be too quiet. But should she be hearing it?

She felt and heard her own breathing accelerate in a panicky rhythm. Was the baby all right? Had something gone wrong?

She opened her eyes.

There he was. The bassinet was next to her bed, just out of reach. The baby sleeping, one tiny hand showing atop the soft thin striped blanket, a blue cap on his head.

Ellie breathed slowly, deeply, and sat up slowly, painfully. She shoved her own blankets out of the way, swung her feet down, grabbed the bed rail and tried to stand up. On the second try, she made it. Carefully, she inched over to the bassinet, leaned over, lifted the blanket. The baby stirred and opened his eyes. They were a dark grayish color, not yet brown.

The baby wriggled and made a small fussing sound. She didn't want him to cry. Daniel had hated it when people saw him cry. She bent and took baby Daniel in her arms, shuffled back to her bed and sat, holding the baby against her shoulder, rocking back and forth. "Hush, Daniel. Hush, my love. Ellie's here. I'm here, sweetheart."

When the tears came, she turned her head to keep them from falling on the baby. But her sobs upset the rhythm of her rocking, and Daniel began to cry.