

# My baby

*by* Ajay Nair

The nightmares started in the seventh month. I have always been a deep sleeper and one of the things that comes with that facility is an inability to extricate oneself from nightmares. I was often trapped in horrible dreams and would writhe and struggle against the barbed wire of uncomfortable visions. But this was extreme even by my standards. The first nightmare displayed my soon to be born baby being born dead, but with her eyes ghoulishly open, staring at me.

I was never married to her mother. We had a relationship of convenience. We enjoyed the little delicacies of life that were the prerogative of a couple that was committed but unattached. Freshness; sometimes, a little suspense, a bit of an edge. Teeth, I called it — a relationship with teeth.

We had always taken a rather blasé approach to contraception. It was as if neither of us believed that any sexual act between us would actually result in the creation of a child. We were not ready for it and by that fact only, it could not be. So finding out that we were expecting a child was a surprise.

Something possessed us not to have the child aborted. It was only in the second trimester that the implications of that decision hit me. It was like a punch of accumulated strength that had been building up somewhere out of sight and then one day, while I was least expecting it, it landed on my gut. Soon, it was nightmare time.

The nightmares escalated in a series of visions that were more and more macabre. The dead baby was followed by a live one, but one that had no hands or feet, just small, tiny lumps that ended in squishy, round surfaces. Like mashed potatoes. In its wake arrived visions of floating heads and spilling intestines.

I didn't share these nightmares with my partner. She had enough to deal with, as it were. Instead, I noted them down in great detail in my journal. As if the act of writing them down would reduce their horror. I still carry that journal around with me like some sort of warning. Or protection.

By the time the baby was due, I was smoking thirty cigarettes a day. The nightmares had migrated to full-blown hallucinations. Once, as I leaned over to kiss my partner good night, I felt that my hand, fondling her soft, full belly was covered with the baby. My hand was inside the baby and I could feel her insides wrapped around my fingers. I recoiled as if bitten by a snake. There was no way this was going to turn out well; all these hellish dreams meant something terrible, that I knew.

The day of the delivery was particularly memorable. All the way to the hospital, I kept seeing babies wrapped in black goat-skin strewn all over the highway; some of whom I had no choice but to drive over. I don't know to this day how I managed to transport a pregnant woman to the hospital safely.

As I paced the corridor outside the delivery room, every nightmare that I had had revisited me in an intense staccato burst of fury. I cowered down against the wall, pleading with them to let me be, till some kind nurse took pity on me and gave me something that relaxed me.

The next thing I remember is my baby being shown to me, draped in the softest towels in the world. She had a pink, unremarkable face and a pungent, spicy smell. I threw up.

I found out that there was nothing wrong with my baby. She had all her organs accounted for and in fine, working condition. My partner was fine too; as far as natural births went, it had been

smooth and brief. When I walked out of the hospital that day, I don't think I knew that I was walking out of their lives for good.

