

Rocking Moment

by Erika Byrne-Ludwig

The mother paused a short while — what was on her mind one might guess — before leaving the pram outside the corner shop on the footpath. The baby was asleep. Lulu happened to casually walk by. She looked into the pram, thought she saw an angel, reflected, smiled, before furtively uncovering him and lifting him up. Against her breast he woke up, gave a small cry, stopped, his crooked mouth ready for a repeat, his eyes aureoled with sleep, light and tears. She patted his back in a melodic circular movement and whispered cherub words before tucking him back in, her hand a gull wing fluttering on the blue breathing blanket, her gaze projected beyond his to perhaps touch a memory of her own.

The mother came out of the shop, holding bags, a lock of hair playing on her face, her steps short and busy. She saw Lulu rocking the pram and looking in: an ominous black figure looming over *her* baby. For a moment her feet, as if caught in a trap, stood still at an awkward angle, while her crippled mouth opened to call out. Deep in his flannel wrap, the baby began to cry.

Waking up to reality after the stolen moment, Lulu walked away, her high heels unevenly click-clacking on the pavement, a cloud of scarf floating on her hunched shoulders like a red flame following her, hands deep in her pockets, trying maybe to retain the soft and yielding shape she had held just before.

Overcome by fear, possibly recalling the vague premonition she might have had before entering the shop, the mother rocked the pram in rhythm with her own commotion — distracted jerks that brought on whimpers of protest or fear under the hood —, her alarmed eyes filled with the vision of a sudden loss, a very raw and palpable drama that did not happen but which in her distraught

mind could have, and was likely to, if it hadn't suddenly been averted.

The wheels began turning when the echo of Lulu's steps reached the last dying note.

