

BABY MOUSE

by marci stillerman

BABY MOUSE She and the baby squeeze into the neon blue star-studded rocket ship in front of K-Mart, a tight fit because the baby's still inside her and the ship is made for under ten year olds and the steering wheel dents her stomach and the baby backs up and knocks hard against one of her body parts to say hey, watch it. A squirt of pee leaks out and slides down her leg under loose pants like a warm tear. Take it easy she tells the baby and puts a quarter in the slot. We're going to the moon, kid, nonstop. Whoeee! Earlier this day her mam gave her the once-over. "You pregant?" "Yeah, I guess." "You guess. How'd that happen, you stupid cow?" "Usual way," she'd said. "I ain't no Mary-mother-of-God." "Who the fuck's the pap?" "Wouldn't say if I knew." Course she knows but what the hell.... He's way gone. "I got no plans for a bastid. Get quit of it or scram." Mam pushes past her on the way to Glinty's and the afternoon gargle. No way am I getting quit of you, she tells the baby. You and me sticks together. We got only each other in this sorry world. There's ways to live on the street and she finds them. Some men pay good for pregnant girls and there's restaurant dumpsters with leftovers snugged in cartons people forget to take home. She and the baby sleep under the stars or, no stars, under the bridge where the cement keeps some of the warmth of the daytime sun. She has a plan for her and the baby. After the birth, they'll hitch to Disney Land, the baby on her back. She knows Disney Land from TV, a heaven on earth run by people who love kids. It's got rides for thrills and caves for magic and music and food and Mickey and Minnie Mouse for love. She's got this idea to pitch to the Disney people. A special act for the Disney Theater. Mickey Mouse and Minnie get married at the wedding chapel and live happy ever after with Baby Mouse in Mouse Land. Kids will go for the act big time. Hollywood in Mouseland. CDs, storybooks to sell in the gift shops. Baby Mouse dolls with big button eyes, thready whiskers, twisty pink tails, big baby feet. Every kid wants a Baby Mouse doll. She pats her stomach.

Baby Mouse, that's you. Up there in costume on the Disney stage. We'll be rich. The days click by like the timer on a bomb. She sleeps a lot, eats whatever comes by, takes coins offered by other homeless in pity for a lost, pregnant girl. Baby Mouse goes on growing. It's November and Baby Mouse bounces like a basketball in her gut. Take your time, Baby Mouse. You'll need all your strength. She takes to hanging around County ER. Baby Mouse's not goin' to show up on no dirty toilet-stall floor. She sleeps in the ambulance port, out of winter wind and rain. When the cramps get bad, she staggers into the ER too far gone to answer questions. The baby weighs in at 5 plus pounds, a girl, birth certificate name of Disnee Parker. Father left blank. Later, in the hospital room, Baby Mouse sucking at her breast, she tells the social worker the father's in the army in Iraq. Says the baby and her will stay with her mam. Questions, questions, questions, and made up answers, and that night, the ward busy with visiting hours, she dresses herself, puts a spare diaper in her pocket, sneaks Baby Mouse, in pink cap and wrapper, down the elevator and out the hospital doors. Free. Shivering on the cold hospital grounds, aching breasts seeping watery milk, blood smelling like iron pee leaking out of her and Baby Mouse's screams splitting her ears, her brains scramble. Don't cry Baby Mouse. Minnie's looking out for you. She stuffs some of the spare diaper in Baby Mouse's tiny mouth. Baby Mouse twitches, quiets and closes her eyes. Minnie Mouse clutches sleeping Baby Mouse to her breast and heads for the highway that will take them home to Disney Land.

