

## Smurf

The pee test hung in the air, caught tightly between my thumb and index finger. I stared; eyes unblinking. I was submerged somewhere in between emotions, with shit in one hand piss in the other, literally holding the piss. Elation, horror, and shame being held in the other. Finally, my life was going somewhere, a purpose, a reason to breath the air that I thought I wasted. It had only been a year since being involuntarily committed to a mental hospital with two attempts at suicide. This was my beginning, my hope. However, something sunk deep and dark within me; it was too soon, we weren't married. My emotions warred and battled. The shame of it slicing at my conscience, searing my heart.

The night we met, I had been having a party at my house when he came over to tell my friends and I to "shut the hell up". He was the security guard stalking the night under the moonlit and star covered sky, on the prowl for crime and disobedience.

"Turn your music down," he said.

"Hey security guard, you're hot!" I said.

We spent the whole night talking, me following him on his route around the complex walking my emotional service chihuahua, Teddy. Something drew me towards him, wanting to know him; but the side of me that was ashamed of my past took over. I told him my whole life story, hoping to scare him off. Beware of the crazy girl and all of that. It didn't work.

We only knew each other for two weeks before I moved in with him. Three months later resulted in the pee test. The plus sign screamed at me, pregnant!

Life happened, sending me on a violent windstorm of circumstances and events. My path was twisted and dark, like a gnarled oppressive forest sent straight out of *Lord of the Rings* filled with ugly creatures sent from hell, just for me. My emotions weren't normal, I wasn't normal. I saw other happy expectant mothers and wondered why that couldn't be me. I was told by my counselor and my doctor that because of my past I was susceptible to postpartum depression. I was prepared. I thought I was prepared. I wasn't prepared. And neither was he. I was emotionally and mentally ill, only twenty-two; not ready.

Our relationship was a whirlwind of ups and downs, a lot of it blurring and swirling together like an awful rendition of Van Gogh's scream painting. Throwing together his unknown struggle with PTSD caused by going to war and my fragile mind being the result of child abuse, rape, and failure; was like letting a child play with a chemistry set, haphazardly mixing toxic chemicals together, waiting to see what would happen. Mix. Shake. Fizz. Wait. Explode. Boom! We loved and fought like two crazed lunatics fighting over an imaginary miniature giraffe. He wasn't completely thrilled about the pregnancy; his own emotions were battling it out. Time went by, my stomach got bigger, the cravings got weirder. We were finally married on a beautiful sunny day in May, my guilt and shame blew away like wisps of smoke in the early morning air. I was just happy I didn't end up waddling down the aisle like a fat penguin.

We still hadn't agreed on a name for our daughter. Then one night he was dreaming, and sat straight up in bed, startling me.

"Zuriel, we have to name her Zuriel", he said looking at me wildly.

From then on, his own feelings about the pregnancy changed. The name Zuriel means the "rock or strength of God", a biblical name. We had already decided on her middle name, Violet,

my great-grandmother's name. Zuriel Violet, a strong beautiful name, mixed with the strength of God and a beautiful fragrant flower.

She wanted to come into the world early at 34 weeks, "too soon" my doctor said. They were worried about her underdeveloped lungs, so I was given a shot to help accelerate their growth just in case she decided not to listen and come out anyways. Her name had become the source of strength I didn't know that I would need when bed rest would take away some of the things that helped me to barely hang on to my sanity.

I held her in my womb until the 37<sup>th</sup> week which is what my doctor was hoping for. I awoke at three o'clock in the morning, happy, full of energy I had never felt in all of my life. I felt as though I could run a marathon. I woke my husband up so we could go for a walk. We picked black berries and watched the sun come up, glittering like golden diamonds across the Puget Sound. It was a beautiful July morning, full of promises. A deep throbbing began in my lower abdomen, followed by pressure in my lower back. He continued to pick black berries, I told him I felt weird, like something was wrong. Was I peeing myself? My mom had told me the stories about her pregnancies with my brother and me. Her water had broken like a dam bursting forth. On movies, it was always "uh oh" and a gush of water spilling onto the floor as the pregnant woman just stands there horrified. Not mine. it leaked out slowly, so slowly that when we had made it to the hospital the nurses told me that it was probably just a bladder leak, the weight of the baby forcing me to pee myself. The pain ripping through me, told me otherwise.

After an amniotic fluid test, much to the surprise of the nurse, my water had indeed sprung a leak. I wasn't progressing like I should, my cervix wasn't dilating, it was stubborn like me. I had already decided early on that I was going to have a natural birth; I had planned it for months. No pain meds, no epidural. Natural, the way God intended. My body, however, had other plans. My

doctor ordered for Pitocin to be pumped into my veins. The nurses assured me that the Pitocin would feel just like normal contractions, allowing my body to progress in labor like it would if it was actually cooperating. I was surrounded by a bunch of evil liars masquerading as health professionals. Torturers, Satan's minions, evil witches, were some of the words that popped into my head as I lay there as the poison seeped through my veins and violated my womb, coaxing it into painful spasms.

A gory fight scene from the movie *Boondock Saints* blared out of the television set speakers. Blood and chaos rang through the birthing room, causing the nurses to pause and give each other weary glances.

"Um, maybe this movie isn't the best movie to be watching," my friend Cia said.

I didn't agree. It was a perfect movie for it was a perfect expression of what was going on inside my body, however, I agreed to turn it off. All the while my now husband, fiddled with everything from my bed, moving it up and down using the remote, to the lights that blared down on me overhead. I wanted to kill him.

"Asshole!" My mom whispered to Cia.

I couldn't hang on any longer. The pain was too much. I broke down and asked for pain meds, feeling weak and defeated. Only they didn't work. They only took away my ability to fight through the pain, making the pain worse, my brain loopy. I felt like a failure. My time in the Army rushed back to me swiftly hitting me with the force of a semi-truck. My knee had given out. My body failed me then and it was failing me now. I couldn't handle the pain. I was weak. I was a failure.

"I can't! I can't! I can't!" I cried writhing and twisting in pain on the hospital bed as the Pitocin forced ripples and waves through my womb.

The needle for the epidural stabbed into my spinal cord. Sweet relief enveloped my lower body. I was finally able to relax; I could actually close my exhausted blood shot eyes and sleep. After a few hours of bliss, the feeling in my lower body slowly made itself known. Then there was the worst pain I had ever felt in my life bulging and hammering deep down inside. I felt a sharp and jagged boulder heavy in between my legs.

“I’ve got to push!” I screamed.

My mom called for the nurse. She meandered on in smiling at me. I wanted to wipe the smile from her face and stab her in the ass with an IV needle. Four sets of hands helped me onto my side at her request. I screamed as the boulder shifted down lower threatening to rip out of my body like the alien off of *Space Balls*, only mine wouldn’t be dancing around singing, wearing a top hat.

“I need to push!” I screamed again.

“Oh, it’s just a little pressure,” the nurse said.

She had everyone help me back onto my back and spread open my legs with a condescending and impatient look on her face. Up she stuck her uncaring and sharp fingers inside of me. The look immediately vanished off her face. She looked at the monitor then ran out. Finally, someone was actually listening to me. In came a swarm of nurses and a doctor. Not my doctor, but a short Asian one. She sat down on the rolling chair and rolled up in between my legs and instantly disappeared. At some sort of signal that she must have given, an oxygen mask was quickly placed on my face and everyone, including my husband was pushed to the side. Everyone was silent, eyes wide. Something was wrong.

“Can you feel your contractions?” The invisible doctor asked me.

“Yes!” I gasped to my mountain of a stomach.

“Okay, when you feel the next one coming, I want you to push as hard as you can.”

Ten agonizing pushes later, the boulder burst forth ripping from my womb, my body exploding in indescribable pleasure as the pressure released. Instantly the nurses surrounded the doctor.

“Oh no...” My mom whispered.

“It’s okay. It will be okay,” Cia whispered back to my mom, giving her hand a squeeze.

What the hell was going on? Then I saw it. It wasn’t a her, I’m not sure what the hell it was. What was that thing? The doctor and nurses carefully unwrapped the umbilical cord that was tightly strangling the baby. Not even a minute old and already my child was met with violence, strangled by what was supposed to nourish her. She was blue.

“I gave birth to a Smurf!” I croaked.

Nobody paid any attention to me. I felt numb. My husband squeezed my hand.

“A Smurf, I gave birth to a Smurf!” This time all eyes were on me looking at me like I was an absolute lunatic.

They continued giving both of us oxygen, the taste of plastic and chemicals coated my tongue. She wailed. Everyone let out a collective breath at the same time. She was okay. The witch nurse placed her on my stomach, beaming at me. I felt nothing. I forced myself to cry, it was expected of new mothers; the happy cry of bringing a new life into the world. I felt empty as the forced tears trailed down my chin onto the top of her head full of dark hair. My mom took pictures, Cia hugged my husband, and the nurses were congratulating themselves. Something was wrong with me, but I said nothing.

I went through the motions of caring for her, nursing her, holding her throughout the night, pretending everything was okay as the nurses did their routine checks. In the morning my doctor

came in, I tried to keep the accusing glare caused by him not being there for me off my face as he informed me that everything looked great and that he would start the process of discharging us. A slow panic began to rise within me, I tried swallowing it down, but it bit the back of my throat like bile. I was placed into a wheelchair with the baby in my lap. A nice nurse pushed me through the maze of hallways while my husband and mom paraded behind us. We stopped on a crowded elevator where everyone gave congratulations, cooed at the baby, and told me how beautiful she was. I couldn't breathe. I gave up on trying to pretend any longer and sat there with eyes glazed over, my mom smiled enough for the both of us. I looked down at the thing nestled in my arms and lap, not a Smurf any longer, but an alien creature all the same. Time stood still as the panic covered me like a dark blanket snuffing out light and all that is good in the world. I wanted to leave her at the hospital and drive away with my husband and not look back.

We were to follow my mom to a gas station so she could fill up our gas tank. We couldn't even afford gas, how in the world were we going to afford a baby? I sat in the back seat next to my newborn and cried.

"Are you in pain?" My startled husband asked as he looked at me in the rearview mirror.

"No!" I wailed.

"Then what's wrong?"

"I don't know!" I sobbed.

He got out of the car to fill the gas tank and spoke to my mom. She came over to talk to me. I don't exactly remember what words she used, but they didn't bring comfort; I just cried harder.

The next six months were an agonizing blur of chaos, sorrow, desperation, and paranoia. When I gave her a bath, I had the urge to walk away and let her little head submerge into the water and take her breathe away. Instead I held her head out of the water staring at her little arms

waving this way and that, letting my hot tears mix with her lukewarm bath water. I would sit on our couch in the living room holding her, staring at a small wall partition in the kitchen thinking someone was there, a man with a knife that would come and stab my baby. I walked around with a butcher knife, looking for all the places someone could hide in our small one-bedroom apartment, ready to take on anyone who would dare hurt my baby. The urge to protect her and hurt her warred inside of me, wrenching me sideways into circles of panic and anxiety. A counselor was sent to the apartment twice a week, a nurse once a week. My mom would come and clean out the maggots that wriggled inside the kitchen sink.

After those six months, I still hadn't bonded with her. A mother's bond with her child is such a precious and empowering band of invisible love, something that was nonexistent for my baby and me. I continued to breastfeed her in the midst of it all, it was the one thing I could do for her, the one thing I was actually doing right. Slowly the veil of darkness and depression lifted. A year after her birth, I was finally functioning like a normal human being. That bond still wasn't there, but I no longer felt as though I was drowning, wanting to take her down with me. I was taking care of myself, making my husband his lunches for work, and I wasn't afraid to be alone with my daughter any longer.

It's been almost fourteen years since the day that she arrived in this world. My mom had given me a beautiful porcelain doll one year for Christmas when I was around eleven years old. It had beautiful big brown eyes fringed with long beautiful lashes, long dark curly hair, and wore a pretty pink floral dress. When I found out that I was pregnant with my daughter I had stared at that doll, praying that she would look just like it. She's turned out to be even more beautiful than I could ever have imagined.

I don't have an exact moment of clarity, where I can say "oh that's when I fell in love with my baby," it came on slowly. Little things like her warm milky smell, the way her little finger wrapped around mine, the way she smiled at me with dimpled cheeks and eventually said the words "momma". I can remember watching her on her rocking horse, singing in babbles at around age two, the sunlight filtered through the living room window casting gold and red streaks in her hair. I remember smiling and thanking God for such a beautiful happy girl. It wasn't an easy bond; it was a fight. A fight I fought with all of my heart, and eventually won. She may have come into this world shrouded in darkness, but my baby, the beautiful Smurf who entered this world, is a shiny bright light that chases it all away. My living, breathing, battle scar.