

Chapter 3

Carefully, the intensive care nurse peered into the transparent hospital cot. Inside, the tiny baby girl was fighting for her life. She was attached to a ventilator to help her breathe, and intravenous drips fed her and kept her heavily sedated. There was no name on her wrist band. It just read baby X. Hooked onto the metal bar on the bottom of the cot was her stats chart, and it did not look good. The poor little mite was suffering from drug-withdrawal symptoms; her body twitched and writhed in spasms, despite the sedation. Her outlook was not good. Her mother, Karena, had been taken to rehab a few hours after the birth and would not be allowed to see her baby. The next twenty-four hours were critical for the tiny infant. The nurses were continuously monitoring her for any changes in her vital statistics.

Suddenly, alarms rang out at the nurse's station. Baby X's condition had deteriorated. Her heart rate was feeble, her breathing was very shallow, and her blood oxygen levels were dangerously low. The intensive-care doctor was called, along with the crash team. Carefully, they lifted the 1lb-8oz baby out of the cot and placed her onto the flat table-top. Gently, they set to work adjusting the medication levels, manually breathing for her and monitoring every change. Eventually, after a lengthy battle, they stabilized her condition and could return her to her incubator. This happened several times during the night; therefore, the decision was made that if her heart should stop again, they would not resuscitate her.

Miraculously, she made it through the next morning and continued to be stable throughout the day and following night. The spasms from the addiction had stopped, and she was stable at last. A few weeks later she was well enough to come off the ventilator, and she could have her first proper feed. The bottle was so tiny that it contained only about 5ml. of milk. They rubbed the teat across her lips, and the sucking reflex thankfully started. She managed to drink all of the contents. She was fed like this every hour for the next week, and then slowly the amount of milk was increased. Her weight was increasing, she was breathing on her own, and later she was transferred onto the high-dependency ward. Slowly she progressed, steadily putting on weight, and began to open her eyes. Two weeks later she went onto the general ward, and social services began to look for a foster home for her.

Suitable foster parents were found, and the day soon arrived for her to leave the hospital. Baby X, still very thin and small, looked like a little doll. The foster mum gently placed her into the car seat, fastened the straps, and placed a small, pink teddy bear onto her lap. Mr Patterson, the foster father, looked at baby X and then his wife and said, "I think she looks like a Sarah. Shall we name her that for now? After all we can't keep calling her baby X."

"Yes, I think that suits her. We will inform the authorities tomorrow and see if that will be alright.", Mrs Patterson replied enthusiastically.

At that moment Sarah opened her eyes briefly and then fell back to sleep. It looked as though she was very contented.

It was a short journey to their home. Luckily the traffic had been light, and Sarah didn't stir at all. Mr Patterson carried the car seat into their front room, where a Moses basket draped in pink lace stood on a wooden stand. Carefully, they unstrapped Sarah and laid her in the basket, and placed the teddy bear beside her head. She hadn't made a sound since they had left the hospital, and they were a bit concerned about that. Later, they heard a quiet pitiful cry coming from Sarah. Mrs Patterson rushed to pick her up and cradled her in her arms. Mr Patterson brought the warm bottle of milk that had been prepared earlier. Eagerly, Sarah suckled on the bottle and devoured the whole lot. She had her nappy changed, was burped, and then cuddled until she dozed off into a contented sleep. Sarah woke during the night for a feed and change of nappy, and then went back to sleep. Considering what she had been through, she seemed to be very happy.

The following morning, the social worker arrived and checked that all was well. She agreed with the name Sarah, and it was arranged that her name would be registered as Sarah. There would be several more visits from social workers, nurses and doctors over the next few months.

Sarah was thriving with her foster parents, and her size and weight had caught up with the average of a girl of her age. She was still a quiet baby but appeared to be happy and was physically and mentally developing as a normal child should. Unfortunately, the time would come when the Pattersons would have to hand her back to the authorities for adoption. This is where things began to go wrong once again for Sarah.

Sarah was a one-year-old, the age when the foster parents had to let her go. It was with a heavy heart that they passed her to the child care team. They assured Mr and Mrs Patterson that Sarah would be well cared for and a family had already been lined up for her adoption.

She was taken to her new family that afternoon. She would stay there while all the appropriate legal details were sorted. The family cared for Sarah as if she were her own. They had wanted a child for so long. They were devastated when they were told that they couldn't have a child of their own, and that is when they decided that they would adopt.

Everything was going fine; she was a happy, intelligent and loved child. They took her to the park regularly, played games with her and read her stories - all the usual things a loving family would do. After six months, the time had come to go to court to finalise the adoption. The family were very nervous; even though they had been through rigorous tests and interviews (including aunts, uncles etc.), they knew things could still go wrong at the last minute. Of course, that is when things went wrong for poor Sarah yet again. Because of a loophole in the law, she could not be fully adopted. The solicitor had failed to get a signed document from her legal mother to allow the adoption to go ahead. Apparently Karena had relapsed when she was discharged from rehab and was back on the streets again. The authorities were desperately trying to find her. Until they did, there was no possible chance of a legal adoption.

Many months had passed, and still the adoption could not be completed. Poor Sarah had to be taken back into care so that the couple could adopt another child. For years, she was sent from foster home to foster home. Even though they were loving families, her behaviour suffered; she became withdrawn and irritable and not very sociable. She was finding it very difficult to become attached to anyone because, as soon as she did, she was moved again. Finally, she was sent to the modern-day equivalent of an orphanage. She was not treated cruelly there, and most of the other children tried to play and interact with her, but she was too sad and withdrawn to join in with them. There was no best friend or favourite adult that she felt secure with, and that is where she had to stay until that fateful day when she took things into her own hands and ran away.

She didn't have a clue where she was going of course. She ran and ran until she was exhausted, and then managed to sneak onto a coach bound for the coast. Crawling under a seat, she curled up into a tight ball. Sarah had no idea where the coach was going, and kept her eyes tightly closed until she heard the coach driver had switched off the engine. When she no longer heard the passengers talking, she crept out from her hiding place and dashed off the coach, running and not looking behind her, just in case she had been spotted. The problem with not knowing where she was nor looking behind her, was that she ran straight off the cliff edge.