

The Goodbye That Changed Me

By the time Day 4 arrived, the weight of uncertainty hung thick in the air. The beeping of the machines—once a strange comfort—now felt louder, more urgent. Leilani was still fighting, still holding on with every ounce of strength her tiny body could offer. The doctors told us she was stable. That word, so fragile, gave us just enough reassurance to go home. Just for a moment. Just to rest.

We hadn't left the hospital in days. My body was aching—sore from the C-section, drained from sleepless nights and endless emotions. We made the hardest decision: to go home, if only briefly. Not because we wanted to be away from her, but because we needed strength to keep going. To shower. To breathe. To grieve.

I remember stepping into the house. It felt hollow without her. I sat down for only a moment when the silence was shattered by the sharp ring of the phone.

Ring.

My heart dropped.

I already knew.

It was the doctor. Her voice was calm, but I could hear the storm behind the words:

“We need you to come back to the hospital.”

I didn't ask questions. I didn't need to. My soul reacted before my mind caught up. We rushed back. Back to the NICU. Back to a truth I had tried to avoid, even for a few hours.

The doctors met us with solemn eyes. One of them said, "Leilani has taken a turn for the worse. We need to make a decision about life support."

The room stood still.

My knees nearly buckled, but somehow I kept walking. I went straight to her side. She was still so beautiful. Still my Leilani. Still holding on, even as the machines did most of the work now.

Her tiny hand reached out again, as if she knew we were there. In that moment, she gave us one final gift: Her presence. Her strength. Her quiet way of saying, "I love you, too."

And that was when I knew. As much as I wanted her to stay, I couldn't let her suffer.

With tears blurring everything in front of me, I kissed her forehead and whispered,

"It's okay, baby. If you're tired, you can rest now. You've done so well. Mommy and Daddy love you more than anything."

When it was time to call our family to say goodbye, we made those heartbreaking phone calls. One by one, they came. Some brought prayers, some brought tears, some just sat in silence with us. But when I called my own mother—desperate for her voice, her presence, anything to help carry the weight—her response pierced deeper than I could've imagined.

"I'm at work. I can't come."

That moment broke something inside me. I couldn't understand how the world could keep moving while mine was falling apart. I needed her. I needed my family. But the people I thought would

show up for me the most... didn't. The absence wrapped itself around me like a second grief. I had never felt so alone.

Letting go wasn't giving up. It was giving her peace.
It was the most painful act of love I have ever known.

In four days, Leilani changed my entire world.
She made me a mother in the purest, most powerful way.
And though I had to say goodbye, the love she gave—and the love I carry—will live in me forever.

A Note From Mercedes

Dear Heart,

If you've made it this far, I want to pause and say—thank you. Thank you for holding space for my story, for my babies, and for the sacred, hard truths we rarely speak aloud.

Writing *Held for a Moment, Loved for a Lifetime* was one of the most vulnerable things I've ever done. It was written through tears, through trembling hands, through whispered prayers that somehow, these words would reach the hearts that needed them most.

If you've experienced the loss of a child, or love someone who has—I want you to know this:

You are not broken.

You are not alone.

And your baby's life—no matter how short—mattered.

I see you. I stand with you. I honor your grief, your love, your journey. If this chapter touched your heart, the rest of the book is here to walk with you through the darkness and into those quiet glimmers of light that still remain.

I hope you'll join me.

With all my love,

Mercedes