

## Shattered Dreams

“What! What do you mean, you lost the baby?”

I rush toward Maggie, not wanting to believe what I just heard.

“I lost it,” Maggie repeats, now sobbing. “In...in the bathroom ... there was so much blood ... I know I lost it ... I just know it...Oh Dennis.” Her words slam into me in staccato bursts nearly knocking me off my feet. She stands there, her hands covering her face, her body trembling.

My heart is pounding as I gently guide her to a kitchen chair. Maggie falls into it and buries her head in her crossed arms on the edge of the table. She’s still shaking . I kneel next to her and place my right arm around her waist, trying to comfort her, trying to pull her closer. She sits stone rigid.

Not knowing what to say and desperate to calm her or perhaps myself, I ask Maggie “How do you know for sure? Just because you had some bleeding doesn’t mean you lost the baby.” *This is our first pregnancy and I have no idea what I’m talking about. I just want that to be true.*

Maggie raises her head slightly, “I knew this would happen. I just knew it.” Then buries her head in her arms again.

“I’m calling the doctor,” I quickly respond. “We have to get you to the doctor. He’ll tell you it’s okay. Stop thinking this way! Please don’t do this to yourself!”

Maggie sits quietly at the kitchen table as I hurriedly begin fumbling through our address book for the doctor’s number. His name totally escapes me. “Maggie! Who’s your doctor?”

She speaks softly through her folded arms, “Doctor Perez.”

I'm beginning to panic as I scan through Maggie's unique filing system. Did she list him under his name, or his hospital, or in a totally separate category of *doctors*? My mind is racing faster than my fingers can flip the pages. I find the name under *Doctors* and begin dialing. My hands are shaking and I have to redial two more times.

The receptionist answers and tells me she'll page Dr. Perez and call me back as quickly as possible. I hang up and return to Maggie's side, stroking her hair and caressing her hands, kissing her gently and reassuring her, "It's going to be okay, babe, I promise." *Why am I promising? I don't know what I'm talking about. How can I tell her it's going to be okay?*

Maggie lifts her head above her folded arms just enough to show her eyes—and her eyes tell me she doesn't believe a word I'm saying.

The receptionist calls back in a matter of minutes that seems much longer. "The doctor wants your wife to go to the emergency room. Will she need an ambulance?"

I don't know how to answer that question. How am I supposed to know if she needs an ambulance?

"Maggie, the doctor says we should go to the hospital. Do you need an ambulance?" *Why am I asking her? I'm supposed to be her protector, yet I'm clueless when she needs me most.*

With her head still buried in her crossed arms, Maggie shakes it "no." I tell the receptionist that it's not necessary and we'll be there in twenty minutes.

As we drive to the hospital, Maggie stares blankly out the window while I make some inane comments about the weather and the song playing on the radio. I don't want her losing herself in her superstitious beliefs, yet I know it's already too late. She barely speaks to me, answering my petty questions with "no" or "yes."

Sometimes her answer has nothing to do with the question, but I don't correct her. She's not hearing me anyway.

When we arrive at the hospital, the emergency staff has already been notified that we're coming. Maggie is immediately placed in a wheelchair and I'm instructed to go to the admission desk to complete some paperwork. Before the nurse departs, I hug Maggie and repeat what I pray is true, "You're going to be fine. You'll see." A wry smile crosses Maggie's face as she gently squeezes my arm.

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I've been with the admission clerk for thirty minutes, leaning forward on the edge of my chair, knees jointly bouncing in rhythm while my fingers tap nervously on her desk. I'm ready to leap from the chair because I can't think of anything other than Maggie being alone in the emergency room while I'm here filling out forms and answering stupid questions. When the hospital feels that my torture has been sufficient, the admission lady tells me "You can see your wife now. She's in the ER, number 14. Go down the hall on the left, turn right at the end and..."

I jump to my feet, almost knocking over the chair before she completes her directions and hurry down the hall and through the doors of the emergency room. Never having been in an ER, I'm surprised by rows of curtained spaces as I quickly move through the area. Two nurses are at their station; one standing and talking on the phone, the other sitting at the desk engrossed in writing something. I can't wait to ask where I can find Maggie and hurry past them toward the only three spaces with drawn curtains. The middle one is number 14.

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As I sidle through the closed curtain, I barely notice the nurse standing at the foot of Maggie's bed. It's Maggie I see. The nurse slowly approaches me, places her hand on my shoulder and whispers "I'll leave the two of you

alone for a while.” But, I don’t need her comforting hand or gentle words to tell me that Maggie may have miscarried. No, Maggie’s already told me everything—without saying a word.

She lies motionless, staring at the ceiling, arms limp at her sides. Her face is ashen and her hazel eyes are sunken and reddened dark by tears. She has a vacant look, lost and hopeless, broken and abandoned. Her lips are quivering and her forehead is deeply furrowed as tears trickle down both cheeks.

As the nurse begins to leave, Maggie turns towards me. Her eyes widen; her chin begins to tremble. She has a mournful, almost sheepish look, like a child seeking forgiveness—ashamed or afraid to confess that they have done something wrong. Then she begins crying, “Dennis, I’m...I’m sorry.”

Walking quickly to her bedside, I caress her left hand then lean over to kiss her forehead and stroke her hair. “Hey, stop it! You’ve done nothing to be sorry for. It’s gonna be okay. Don’t worry.”

*Yeah, “It’s gonna be okay. Don’t worry?” That’s easy for me to say. I don’t feel Maggie’s anguish. I just learned a couple days ago that I would be a father. I didn’t keep this bursting news a secret for the past two months. I hadn’t been planning for days how to tell me that I was going to be a “daddy.” Our baby wasn’t growing inside me.*

I sit quietly. Maggie looks blankly into space, occasionally glances at me, then squeezes my hand—not hard, just enough to let me know that she’s glad I’m here. I continue gently stroking her hair with my right hand while caressing her fingers with my left. Not knowing what to say, I say nothing. Maggie tries to smile at me, but her heart is too full of emptiness to finish it, leaving nothing more than a hapless grin languishing on her face.

“Did the doctor say what happens next?” I finally ask.

“I’m not sure,” Maggie sighs. “All I remember is him telling me I miscarried and that I’ll never be pregnant again.”

*I doubt he told Maggie that, but I know that’s what she heard.*

I leave her side, slide the curtain open and ask the first nurse who passes if I can see the doctor. A few minutes later, a young doctor barely older than me enters the room. “Yes,” he did tell Maggie she miscarried. “No,” he never said anything about future pregnancies.

Desperate now to speak for Maggie, I ask him if there’s any chance at all that she didn’t miscarry and that the pregnancy could still be saved.

“I’m sorry, sir. No. She definitely miscarried. I contacted Dr. Perez and he’s recommending a D&C.”

I have some idea what a D&C involves and turn to Maggie to see her reaction. She’s looking past me to the doctor now as the color drains from her face and her eyes fill with tears again.

“Don’t worry,” the doctor lightly interjects. “It’s a simple operation, a very safe procedure. It shouldn’t take longer than an hour.”

And I’m sure he thinks this reassurance will comfort us. And I know he hasn’t the faintest idea that this “simple and safe procedure” just shattered a dream.