

Nora Flanagan

Copper steam

It's a typical Monday morning, I'm waking up in my same surroundings. My rose bed sheets drape over my bed in my tiny room that barely has enough space to hold my bed and all my personal belongings. I begin my morning by listening to the news.

"Today February 20th, 2051 another woman is in custody for trying to leave the country for reasons that can not be stated on live television," said the news reporter.

Every time a woman is arrested the newscaster never says the reason; but the majority of us know it is mostly for the same reason. They showed the women and my heart sank. I knew her, she was patient. I was supposed to help her. Help her try to get out safely. Now she's caught and stuck with a baby that could harm her.

With a heavy heart I begin the process of getting ready for my day; I keep the news on and turn up the volume so I can hear the details of the woman's arrest. As I am getting ready the thought of this happening to one of my patients takes up my mind. Looking over at the time I realize that I am going to be late if I don't hurry up. I put up my hair and threw on my green scrubs with a second glance in the mirror and I hurried putting on my shoes so that I could run out the door; only to find that the elevator in my building is not working and now I will have to run down five flights of steps.

Winded from having to walk those five flights of steps, I finally get outside and I see a street full of people. Some people are walking briskly to work while there are others sleeping on the street. Today out of any day there were more women sleeping on the street. They are sleeping on dirty broken down cardboard with torn up t-shirts as blankets. They have their kids with them. Some with 1 and some with 4. The kids are small and dirty. The dirt smudged on their face and

their hair grown out. They are there because of two reasons. One there is not enough houses for them or two they can't afford a house. Even though the city has put more houses in there still is not enough for everyone. Over time the streets have become packed with cars and the sidewalks are packed with people. Walking the streets we are shoulder to shoulder with one another. There is no way to get around this city anymore.

By the time I reach my office complex, I am already 25 minutes late. Once I'm in the building I'm faced with the fact that I am now stuck waiting for the elevator that always takes forever. While I anxiously await the elevator and take what feels like the longest ride ever, I rub the cross necklace that is hanging around my neck thinking about the woman who was arrested this morning and the trouble I know I will face from the government if they found out I was the one who tried to get her out. Stepping out of the elevator I felt all the eyes land on me. I didn't even look up because I knew people were staring.

One of my coworkers said, "Lily, I hate to be the one that tells you this but your patient, the one that was 20 weeks along. She died. She couldn't carry the baby and it harmed her body."

"Thank you for telling me. Do you know what room she was in?"

"She was in room 356. Everything is in her chart so you can get more details on what happened. I know you were really close with her. I'm sorry," she said with an awkward tone.

Everyone thinks I am really close to my patients because they don't know what I'm doing. After I step off the elevator I sit down in the and I feel a pain in my stomach and in all my rush this morning I didn't eat. I scramble to find a cracker or anything to eat. Just so I can feel somewhat fine again because I have been feeling very well for the last couple weeks. While I'm sitting there I hear something at the door.

My coworker says while knocking on the door, “Hey Lily, your patient Rory is here. And I am wondering if you are ready for her or need some more time.”

“Yes I’m ready. Just send her in. Thank you.”

When the door closes I let out a sigh because the last thing I need right now is for my coworker to think I am upset or unwell. If they think I am really unwell they will tell someone and if they do I will put on a list as someone to be watched and looked out for. The door opens and everyone looks in.

“Hi,” Rory says while she walks in, “I’m sorry if I pulled you away from your thoughts.”

“You are okay Rory. I was just waiting for you because I have been trying to make a plan for you,” I said with a smile.

“Let me hear it. I really need your help,” there was a worried tone in Rory’s voice.

“So with my research I found two ways to help you. The first way is that I could get you medicine and have you stay here until the medicine works. The second way is you get a bus out of the country and meet with a doctor that I would set you up with in Canada. I have a story for you that you would have to tell any government official if they asked you why you are going to Canada. So now the choice is yours.”

“ I think I want to leave. I don’t want to stay here. Not with how it is out there.”

“Perfect, I will send you out with all the information you need to make it safely.”

As she walked out with everything she needs I hope she actually makes it out safely. I know I set her up with everything but it is not guaranteed that she will make it out.

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As I finish the day and I walk home I see the same scene on the streets again. The scene on the street always makes me wish I could help them. The starving kids with their tired mothers

who are waiting for someone to help them. As I reach my apartment building I see a young woman with a small child at her feet crying and she is selling roses, long stem red roses. I stop and think about her choice and what she has to do in order to care for herself and her child. I take the cash out of my pocket and I buy all the roses that she has; I tell her to keep the change so that she can buy herself and her child dinner. I put these roses in the only small vase that I own and I place them on the table by my bed.

“The woman from this morning is now sentenced to 3 years in jail. The longer sentence for lying to the police about why she was leaving,” said the evening news reporter.

I wonder if she thinks her choice was worth all this. I stop and think about whether in time I will think my choice was worth it as well. Thinking about this has given me more light on each option. Whether to choose to risk my life or struggle with raising a child I am not ready for.

I roll over in my bed and end up facing my bag. It's all packed and ready to go. The question is when I am going to leave. I have been trying to get all my patients to a different doctor in another country or get them to the point where they don't need my help. It is hard for me because I am the only doctor in the city who will actually try to find a way for these women not to be pregnant no matter what it takes. Thinking about the patients that I have right now, I realize that it is the perfect time to leave. I have two patients left and I have already helped them with a plan. Now I can leave.

I grab my bag and hurry out of the house. I am not going to the airport because it is too risky so I am taking the bus. I walk to the bus stop. On the way I don't even look around me for the people on the street because I know that if I see the mother with their kids I will regret my decision. As soon as I got up to the bus stop the bus pulled up and I hopped on. Sitting down I look out the window at the city around me. I see Ruby. Now I realize that I am leaving her

behind. As the bus gets closer to her I realize that she is being walked out of her house by the police. I feel my heart break because she now can't leave and I get to leave easily. I feel like I don't deserve to leave because everyone is struggling. The only thing I can think of is what if I could help. But I know it has gotten to a point where help won't do anything.