

Mickey's Moms

At midday on October 28th Chicago honored its White Sox with a huge parade for winning the World Series. Hundreds of thousands of fanatic fans surged through the streets of the Loop to see their sports heroes, to be part of the once in a lifetime excitement. Barrie and Vi were friends who worked together at an insurance company in Chicago. They wanted to go to the street to watch the parade as it passed. They were about to take an elevator down from their 17th offices in the Board of Trade Building.

“Vi, are you still here?” called Barrie Eisley as she hurried across the deserted open desk area of their insurance company’s subrogation section. She had promised Vi she’d accompany her to the street to see the parade in person like every other true fan. Barrie knew Vi shouldn’t even be in the office much less at the parade, but Vi was a Sox fan through and through. She wouldn’t allow her difficult pregnancy to keep her from the parade. Barrie also knew Vi’s husband, Dominic, would be angry if he learned Vi was on the street with the rowdy fans watching the parade.

Vi’s office seemed to be empty as Barrie approached it. She wondered if Vi had tired of waiting for her and had gone downstairs alone. She froze when she saw Vi slumped on the floor behind her desk. Barrie shook off her terror and took action as fast as she could. She felt for Vi’s pulse and checked her breathing, called 911 and gave the dispatcher a short report and a plea for help, put a chair pillow under Vi’s head, coaxed two of the aspirin scattered on her desk down Vi’s throat, and directly and forcefully, told Vi to pay attention. She realized that Vi

wasn't dead or unconscious, just dazed. Barrie pulled Vi's left arm from under her body, straightened her legs, and took off her shoes. Vi's feet were swollen. Vi mumbled that her left arm hurt even after Barrie had freed it. She knew this was probably just a muscular pain but it could also be a symptom of a heart attack. At thirty-six, Vi was two years younger than Barrie but Barrie knew Vi was supposed to be on bedrest because of the strain the pregnancy was putting on her heart. Barrie thought Vi seemed more alert now. Vi asked for some aspirin and was relieved that she already had some. Barrie pushed Vi's desk forward and sat on the floor cradling Vi's head and shoulders on her lap. "I called 911 and their EMTs should be here soon. I'm going to look for help from the building staff," said Barrie. "Cellphones don't work on this floor because of the metal in the walls and no one is answering the house lines probably because of the parade.

Vi squeezed Barrie's hand tightly and hoarsely said, "No, stay!" Vi's tone and intensity surprised Barrie. She could see real fear in Vi's eyes. Vi whispered, "I can't die until this baby is safe and happy". Barrie knew she should immediately search other floors for help but she was unwilling or unable to risk upsetting Vi because of her heart problems. "I'll stay right here with you until the 911 people come. Then I'll go to the hospital with you," said Barrie.

Vi released her grip on Barrie's hand and her breathing became less labored. A roar erupted from the street far below. Barrie guessed the baseball heroes were now nearing the building. Instantly, Barrie was paralyzed by the realization that it would be impossible for the

EMTs to push through the crowds, much less drive their ambulance to the building because of the hundreds of thousands of White Sox fans. As Vi seemed to doze, Barrie said to herself, “Please, not again.” Searing memories of another time, when she didn’t stay with someone who needed her, welled up in Barrie’s mind so fast, so vividly she almost threw up.

A simple, night canoe trip across a summer camp lake to surprise a new boyfriend, her younger sister, Blair, jumping in the canoe and demanding to go too, all the lights going off in both camps when they were in the middle of the lake, crashing into the partially submerged tree swamping the canoe, the coldness of the water, remembering the lake had a current and that the dam was overflowing after the recent storm, being so scared that thinking and breathing were almost impossible, putting her St. Christopher’s medal around Blair’s neck to calm her and protect her, leaving Blair holding onto the tree and the impaled canoe, Blair begging her hysterically not to leave, to take her home, swimming back to the girls’ camp for help, trying to orient herself in the moonless darkness, knowing she’d swum far enough to reach the shore, realizing that she was lost, hitting a buoy and holding on to it from blind fear, remembering that the buoys were near the dam, praying for Blair, for sunlight, men pulling her into a boat, screaming at them about Blair, them not answering, the ER, endless, answerless questions, too many eyes, parents’ crying, Blair’s July funeral, the rest of her life without Blair. Barrie knew that this time she’d stay even if the building were burning down.

“Barrie, are you OK?” asked Vi. “You’re crying.” “Not to worry, I was daydreaming about an old movie,” said Barrie. “Lay down next to me and practice your breathing,” kidded

Vi. “Barrie, I need to tell you something about my husband, Dominic, and baby Mickey. Somebody has to know.”

After the 911 dispatcher finished his action call to the EMTs about the pregnant lady in distress on the seventh floor of the Board of Trade Building, he realized the crowds in the Loop for the White Sox parade would likely double their response time. Also, when he reviewed his call notes, he wasn’t absolutely certain whether the woman was seven months pregnant and on the eighth floor or vice versa. When he called the originating phone to clarify, his call was transferred to a system reception line which simply had an ‘away’ message saying to call back after the parade. The dispatcher concluded that the EMTs were on their way and that nothing more could be done now. He set a fifteen minute call back code on his system. He then picked up a call for medical assistance for someone who had fallen out of a second story window along the parade route.

“I have so much to live for now. It would be wrong to take my life or Mickey’s,” said Vi. Barry was astonished. She wasn’t sure whether Vi was talking to her or to God directly. She felt stupid sitting on the floor with Vi when everyone else was out enjoying the parade. Barrie thought there must be a hundred doctors with a block of this building and Vi had only her to help. By an act of will Barrie overrode her rationality and chose to give Vi the emotional support she needed right now. Barrie put the St. Christopher medal she given to Blair over Vi’s head. Maybe it would work this time. “Why didn’t you have children, Barrie?” said Vi. Though the present situation seemed answer enough for Barrie, she replied, “Time just got away

from me, tomorrow became forever.” “But for this accident,” gesturing to her tummy, “time would have bested me, too,” said Vi. “My heart was fine before Mickey. I passionately hope he won’t be the death of me. I desperately want to live and help him grow up.” “But Dom’s a good man and he’ll be a great father,” said Barrie. “You know he’d always do what’s good for Mickey. “Barrie, my mind’s going back and forth as if I’m going crazy. My sight is blurry now and the headache is back. Someone needs to know about Dom in case I’m gone,” said Vi. “Oh God, Vi, please don’t even think like that,” said Barrie. You got clumsy and you slipped. I absolutely know you will visit us here with the baby in a few weeks. Please Vi, stop talking. You’re scaring me more and I’m already terrified,” said Barrie.”

“I can’t Barrie, something very bad could happen. I don’t have any family in America, only some relatives I Croatia. I don’t want Mickey going there. For the baby’s sake, Barrie, listen to me,” said Vi. “I’ve always suspected that you are somehow walking wounded but now you’re the only one here.” Barrie looked at Vi’s puffy face and calmed herself enough to listen to what Vi wanted or needed to say.

“Barrie, Dom’s not cut out to be a father much less a single parent,” said Vi. We tried so hard to have kids when we were young, even fertility treatments. Dom is very suspicious by nature. When I told him I was pregnant he accused me of carrying another man’s baby, of wanting a baby more than I wanted him. Sometimes he’s crazy. He figured out I was out of town on business around the likely conception date. He badgered me endlessly about who the “real” father is. I started referring to the baby as Mickey, Dominic’s childhood nickname, to

mollify his feelings and to draw him into the pregnancy,” said Vi. “Why didn’t you have a DNA or paternity test to convince him?” said Barrie. “Dom began to accept Mickey as his so I didn’t want to rock the boat,” said Vi. “I don’t even know if it’s a boy or girl yet. I just started acting as if it’s a boy with hope that Dom would get on board one way or the other after delivery. I had an abortion when I was a teenager. I felt our childlessness was my punishment. I’d do anything to bring this baby safely into the world and to give it a happy life,” said Vi.

“Vi, I feel Dom will give you all the support you need and want once this baby is born, boy or girl,” said Barrie. “I think so, too, but only if I’m here to say the right words, and keep Dom’s childcare to a minimum,” said Vi. “But if I’m not here, Dom is not up to single parenthood, no matter his good intentions. His ego will prevent him from asking for help. Dom works hard with hard men in the crushed stone business. He has a short, hot temper. Years ago, a cat I had before we met chewed up some fish Dom had caught and brought home to clean. Dom cornered the cat and kicked it so violently it had to be put to sleep. We never had any pets after that.” “Vi, why are you telling me all this? I can’t control Dom or interfere in his life. Besides, everything will be OK once the three of you live together for a few days,” said Barrie. “Please, Barrie, if I’m gone, find some way to keep any eye on Dom and Mickey, please,” said Vi. “I’m especially afraid if the baby is a girl or if the baby turns out not to be Dom’s” “Vi, What are you saying...?” said Barrie.

They both heard the elevator bell. Barrie jumped up, told Vi she’d be right back, and ran to the corridor. No one was there. Barrie made a frantic circuit of the entire floor and rushed

back to Vi's office. When Barrie got back, Vi was having some kind of seizure. She had wet herself and she was mumbling incoherently. Thinking of nothing else to do, Barrie sat on the floor next to Vi and held her head. The seizure subsided after a minute but Vi didn't regain consciousness. Barrie put another aspirin in Vi's mouth and took three herself. Vi mumbled incoherently as if other people were in the office, her dead brother or Dom. Barrie felt she had to get away but she knew she had to stay. After a few minutes Vi's breathing became slower and steady. Barrie again called 911 but she got a busy signal although, oddly, it seemed general not specific to her call. As she was dialing again she heard the elevator bell again and voices, too. "Over here, over here, over here!" Barrie screamed. The EMTs, a woman and a man, rushed into the office and took charge of Vi. When Barrie slid to the floor in relief, the woman EMT said, "We only have one gurney, you'll have to walk." "Anything, just point me to out," said Barrie. When they got to the ground floor, some police opened a path through the still celebrating fans to the ambulance which was on the sidewalk. The baseball heroes had passed by and the fans were slowly dispersing. Barrie climbed into the ambulance beside the unconscious Vi and unborn Mickey. The man EMT said, "Some afternoon, huh?" Barrie felt like she had let go of the buoy.

Barrie almost threw up when the woman EMT swung the ambulance widely to back it into the narrow alley outside the ER. The EMTs jumped out immediately, threw open the back doors, and pulled Vi's gurney through the ER double doors. Barrie was left behind in the ambulance. Unsteadily, she climbed out and stood off to one side trying to decide whether to

go in or leave. “Vi’s in the hospital now, there’s nothing more I can do,” thought Barrie.

Judging by the number of crushed cigarette butts, a short bench nearby was where the ER staff came to decompress, Barrie sat down heavily. From up the alley a forlorn-looking dog, a Dalmatian, paced over to the bench. Instinctually, Barrie rubbed its head and ears. After a few moments it wandered away. Some thought or feeling was gnawing at Barrie but she couldn’t focus her mind on it. Barrie abruptly decided to go into the ER. Within a few steps into the ER a nurse asked her if she needed help. “My friend, Violet Kamen, had a heart attack at the Board of Trade Building. She’s about eight months’ pregnant. I need to know how she’s doing,” said Barrie. Barrie felt she saw a dark cast flash across the nurse’s face. “Is she OK?” asked Barrie. “Ms. Easley, she’s having a hard time but the doctors are examining her now in that last bed,” said the nurse as she gestured to the fully curtained area. As the EMTs pushed their gurney through the ER toward their ambulance, the woman EMT said to Barrie, “You did a good job with Mrs. Kamen. She wouldn’t made it here without you.” Barrie breathed a sigh of relief and said to herself, “Thank God they’ll be all right.” Where the nurse had Barrie sit was about four bed areas from where a lot of people were helping Vi. Barrie couldn’t hear anything specific but she could see at least four pairs of legs below the curtains. About ten minutes after the EMTs left, Vi’s husband, Dominic, came through the ER doors. Barrie recognized him from the photograph on Vi’s desk. He was of about middle height but very powerfully built, with a shaven head and a very tough looking face. Another nurse intercepted him and spoke with him for a few moments. Barrie heard Dominic’s very audible “No” to the nurse. He marched right to

the curtained area with Vi's bed and slipped in. Less than five minutes later two nurses pushed through the curtains with a very small bed. As they turned to go deeper into to the hospital Barrie realized they were pushing an incubator. Involuntarily, Barrie stood up. Barrie felt that every eye in the ER was trained on Vi's cubicle, that life and death were pulling at Vi's heart. Then an authoritative voice cut through the silence and the everyday noise and said, "No, we'll do it right here. Get more blood!" As two nurses stopped her in her tracks, Barrie said, "What's going on? What's happening to Vi? That's my friend, I've got to help her." The older nurse said steadily, "The doctors are doing all they can to save her life. She needs prayers now." The nurses escorted Barrie to a small office just off the main ER floor. Barrie dropped into a chair and tried to remember how to pray.

After a half hour or so the older nurse came back to the small office. Her face was very serious. She said, "Your friend died a few minutes ago. She lost a lot of blood during the emergency C-section and her heart failed. The baby, a girl, is fine even though three weeks' premature. She'll be kept in the hospital for a few extra days. You did the best that anyone could have in your office. You saved the baby's life." Barrie then explained Vi's stories about Dominic to the nurse. She listened intently and then said, "the type of vascular disorder from which Vi suffered has many symptoms. Some manifest rarely, some more regularly. Hallucinations and unreasoned, accusatory speech are such symptoms. I'll make note of your statements in the medical record so any future investigator can contact you. The nurse walked Barrie to the door out of the ER, hugged her, and recommended she get some

fresh air.

Once she went outside, Barrie remembered that her car was still over near the Trade Building. She called for a cab and was told the wait would be thirty minutes because of the need for cabs for the baseball fans. Barrie sat on the ER bench again.

The Dalmatian was still wandering around. It approached each man who exited the ER but no women. Most ignored the dog but some stopped to pet its head or neck. Barrie guessed it was waiting for its master. She hoped that the dog's master hadn't died in the hospital.

Barrie noticed the next man to exit the ER. It was Dominic, Vi's husband. He stopped within ten feet of Barrie. The dog walked up to him and Dom stooped down. The dog came closer for a pet or a word. Dominic raised his left hand to the dog's face and gave him a forefinger-thumb flick right on its nose. The dog yelped and scampered away. Dominic looked right at Barrie and said, "Gets 'em every time." Barrie averted Dom's gaze and he walked away.

Barrie dug out her cellphone. "Judge Eisley's Chambers, may I help you," said Mrs. Madison. "Hi, Peggy, it's Barrie." "Hello, hello, how are you. I hope you forgot the office today and went to the parade," said Mrs. Madison. "No, I had to stay in. Is he available?" said Barrie. "I'll put you right through." "Hi, B, how's my favorite lawyer?" said Judge Eisley. "Hi, Dad, not so good. Can I ask your advice?" said Barrie. After Barrie talked for fifteen minutes and after Judge Eisley asked a few questions, he said, "They do a lot of testing, genetic and what not of newborns, especially preemies. I'll ask some questions of a hospital administrator I know over there. We should learn who's who in a day or two. I'll call you."

“Barrie, thanks for being such a good person. Your mother and Blair would be proud of you,”
said Judge Eisley.

Barrie went back into the hospital to see Mikki.

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