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March 1974

The two-week honeymoon in Jamaica was over. Roz and Bill returned to the States. Just as the plane landed at BWI, Roz felt a warm sensation. *It is good to be on vacation, without pretense*, she thought. In past travels with Bill, they had to be discreet. She would never forget the time they were flying to Jamaica and Bill sat next to his wife's friend, George. Roz and Bill pretended they didn't know each other. Roz vowed never to travel out of the country with Bill again.

Preparing dinner, washing clothes, and shopping for two was an adjustment for Roz. One she relished. Her transition to married life was a smooth one. One afternoon, while shopping for groceries, she stopped at a florist to purchase lilacs and a dozen roses. As Roz reached in her purse to pay for the flowers, the cashier, a middle-aged woman named Mrs. Yates, replied, "Take a river rock, honey. They are free."

Roz reached into the rustic container to the left of the counter that held the rocks. She searched through, digging way down. Finally, Roz retrieved one. It was a semi-heart-shaped rock. She rubbed it between her index finger and thumb, feeling its smoothness, amazed at the relaxing sensation.

Mrs. Yates gave Roz her change.

Roz put the change in her purse. Mrs. Yates fingered her salt and pepper hair that she wore off her face, and warmly continued. "May life's path be as smooth as the rock, and your happiness flow like the river."

Roz fastened her shoulder bag, and with a smile replied, "Thank you so much. What a nice thing to say."

Mrs. Yates went on to explain, "I associate them with the river and its calming effect."

Even though they are different shapes and sizes, some smooth and others with rough edges, they are still the beautiful works of nature. This is something I want to share with my customers." Mrs. Yates glanced at Roz's roundness. "When is the baby due?" she asked with a smile.

"It's due sometime within the second or third week of this month."

Mrs. Yates told her, with a gleam of pride, "I have three children: two boys and a girl. How many will this be for you?"

"This is my first."

"Congratulations."

Roz felt pleased and made a decision right then to do all her floral shopping at that shop. As much as Roz loved fresh flowers, she decided it would be nice to shop with someone who had a genuine concern for her customers and appreciated natural beauty in a kindred way instead of the stuffy, commercial florist she usually frequented.

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Roz is in her ninth month of pregnancy. In her mind, Roz believed her pains were again false. The night before, she and Bill were visiting Bill's mother when Roz had contractions.

They left Mrs. Bailey's and went to the hospital. After being there for several hours, the doctor told them the labor pains

were false. Earlier the following day, she wanted to have the family over for a cookout.

Rambling off question after question, Roz sat up in the bed. “Honey, is the grill cleaned? Did you take the ribs out? I will butter the corn and wrap them in foil.”

Bill realized the pregnancy had changed Roz’s personality. Calmly he replied, “Don’t you think we should hold off on this cookout thing? We were just at the hospital last night.”

“No, Bill, I feel better now. I’m not having any pain!” she exclaimed. Roz moved to the foot of their king-sized bed, and reached for her purple terry cloth robe and slippers.

Bill fluffed one of the four king-sized pillows and lay back with his hands clasped behind his head. “I really think you should call this off and wait until the weekend.”

Roz, fully dressed in her robe and slippers, looked out the window. “It’s a gorgeous day. I think this evening will be perfect for a cookout. I’m really craving some BBQ. And, besides, we haven’t had everybody over since the baby shower last month.”

Bill stood up, put his arms around her shoulders, then reached down and rubbed her stomach in a circular motion, caressing the baby inside. He bent down and gently kissed the mound of life growing within.

“Let’s compromise. I will get you some BBQ to satisfy your craving, and if you don’t go into labor by the weekend, we can have the cookout.”

There is a little place on the Maryland/DC line that served open-pit BBQ, which they loved. This idea won her over. Looking up at him with a smile, she agreed. "Alright, you win." She was pleased he was still attentive to her needs.

After her second bite into the BBQ sandwich, a piercing sharp pain struck her. It was so severe that she placed the sandwich on the nightstand and climbed into bed, and held the cherry wood bed post tightly, waiting for the pain to subside. Roz wished she had told Bill earlier about the mini pains she was having.

Coming back into the room with drinks and seeing the pain etched on her face, he asked, "Is everything okay? You hardly touched the sandwich. Should I call the doctor?"

"No, I'll be alright, give me a few—" Before she could finish the sentence, another very sharp pain hit, which caused her to give a loud moan. "This pain is worse than the other, but they are not close together," Roz managed to say.

Hurriedly he set the drinks down and grasped the receiver. "That's it. I'm calling the doctor," he firmly replied. "Get ready, because I'm driving you to the hospital. I'm not taking any chances."

Barely able to move, Roz doubled over as Bill pulled a caftan dress from the closet and slipped it over her head. Bill recalled, with a smile, *This is the same dress Roz had on when I asked her to marry me.*

"Okay, but they're only going to send me back home," she sulked.

As the pain seemed to intensify, Roz likened it to the crippling pain from a migraine that transferred to her stomach,

pelvis and lower back, and to her worst day of menstrual cramps. She felt her insides expanding and contracting at the same time, and began to wonder seriously if it were too late to change her mind about becoming a mother.

It was not an ambulance ride with flashing red lights and sirens. No, it was a ride in the family car as Bill carefully navigated the winding roads through Rock Creek Park to Sibley Memorial Hospital. Roz felt every inch of the roadway as well as the continuously increasing pain.

Finally arriving at the emergency room, after what seemed like an eternity to Roz, they found Dr. Cromwell—who had recently delivered another baby—was already at the hospital.

Roz was placed on a gurney, rolled into a room and surrounded by Dr. Cromwell and several nurses. As the pain increased, Roz's patience ebbed and it seemed like they had one thousand and one questions to ask her.

Dr. Cromwell held Roz's hand. "You're really into labor, Mrs. Bailey. The pains are not false this time. I'm going to give you the epidural shot as we discussed. Okay?"

"This is really it?" She looked at Bill, who gave a silent encouragement with his eyes and somber smile, and gently squeezed her hand as if to say, "We're going to be just fine."

Roz looked at Dr. Cromwell again and told him, "Okay," with a lot more firmness than she felt.

Roz received the pain reliever, and Bill went to a room to change into surgical scrubs so he could be there with Roz for the baby's arrival.

Suited in doctor's gear—green top and pants, and white surgical booties covering his feet—Bill sat in the delivery room on a round black stool as Roz watched through a large round mirror directly in front of her. She saw the top of the baby's head. Roz was instructed by Dr. Cromwell to keep pushing. "You are almost there," he urged.

Bill's tearing eyes were watching the birthing process. He felt elated. *I have never witnessed the birth of my other children,* he thought.

With a wide grin, Dr. Cromwell announced, "It's a girl."

A few seconds had passed and there was no sound from the baby. The moment, though brief, was intense. The room filled with relief as everyone began to smile when the tiny baby girl began to cry.

As the nurses cleaned the baby, Bill moved closer to Roz. He held her hand, and kissed her forehead. "She is beautiful, just like you."

As the staff handed the tiny precious bundle to her happy, exhausted new mom, Roz began to grin and cry knowing she had never seen or held anything more perfect than their daughter, who blinked and tried to focus on her face.

The birth certificate read: Aisha Marie Bailey, six pounds, two ounces, nineteen inches, and displayed Aisha's footprints.

“Hello. How is my big man tonight? Are you taking care of Mommy and Aisha?”

“Yes. Daddy, are you coming home tomorrow?”

Bill sat on the side of his bed. “I’ll be home soon, son. Put Mommy back on the phone and give her a kiss for me.”

Brandon gave Roz the telephone. He kissed Roz on the cheek.

“Daddy said to kiss you for him.” Roz smiled.

Roz pulled her earlobe. “Thanks for the kiss. They really have you working hard, huh?”

Bill detected the concern in her voice. “We have been working late hours.” Bill lay back on the bed, placed the phone beside him and rubbed his fingers along the edge. “I guess that’s why Melissa brought the files to me tonight. She probably wants to get back in town to be with her fiancé.”

Roz breathed a sigh of relief. “I miss you so much. I’m not used to sleeping without you for so long.”

“I promise I’ll make it up to you when I come home,” Bill assured her. “It’s no fun sleeping in this room without you. I’m sorry that I couldn’t make it home on the weekends. At least you are home in our bed. I’m in this cold, drab room. I get warm feelings when I think of you and the kids.”

Those words from Bill removed that slight doubt Roz had in her mind when she overheard Melissa’s voice.

“I love you, Bill. Hurry home.”

“I love you too, honey. I will be home soon.”