

“The River in Paradise”

By Anne McClure (RN-BSN 2017)

It’s funny how the words that we never say end up becoming the thoughts etched into the canyons of our minds.

“I’m sorry you have to go through this,” is all I can manage to vocalize. I finish taping her IV site. She briefly adjusts a barren stare fixated on the blank wall and makes momentary contact just below my eyes. “Thank you” gently slips between lines of tears translating into tributaries around her mouth, her eyes returning to their previous withered gaze.

Her surgical procedure has been delayed, outpatient surgery has been quite busy today. Her arms fixated around her belly, she has yet to say a word about the unexpected wait. She instead appears to quietly savor the fading gift of lingering moments, floating in a hidden expanse unseen in her mind, on waves full of longing for the son that she instantly and fiercely loved. For twenty-two weeks she has daydreamed of holding this baby in her arms, this little boy that she can never even meet. She never once suspected that anything was wrong. It never crossed her mind that anything could be wrong, especially nothing as wrong as this. She will have the rest of her life to feel the regret of every move she made for the past twenty-two weeks, despite knowing that nothing could have changed this outcome. She has all of the years of the future to feel irrational shame and guilt that will ebb and flow inside of her.

“The anesthetist will be arriving in just a few moments to take you” I gently tell her from the open doorway to her somber room. She asks if I will get the man that has been in and out from the waiting room.

Slightly hunched he walks to her, face tilted towards the tired tiled floor. He sits slowly into the chair next to her. “Do you want to say good bye?” she asks him in a whisper. His head falls. He moves his hands past hers on the sides of her belly, kissing her stomach over top of her thin hospital gown. His forehead follows his lips and he sits there momentarily, his eyes closed, his tears falling, wetting the belly below him.

In the propofol induced haze the OR brings she briefly leaves this restless, anguished dream. She sighs. She’s transported gently to a place she can barely identify, reminiscent of a forgotten memory, past the outskirts of her mind. Here she walks through whistling grass leading

down to the river. Ahead, a little boy's hair shimmers gold as he runs along in the hot morning sun.

Clutching a cream colored card she awakens in PACU. Reading "With Sympathy" in deep blue letters, it houses two tiny feet inked in a muted charcoal gray. Streams of tears chart a briny flow as she succumbs, momentarily, falling into her own despair, drowning into her loss. She gasps for air as she looks again. They are the most beautiful feet she has ever seen. Holding back my own tears, I lead the man from the waiting room back to her side. She holds the card for him to see "Aren't they the most beautiful little feet you've ever seen?" I see her smile for the first time. His immediate shock abandons his forehead as it relaxes into her reaction to these little gray feet, this small amount of ink, the only possession retained from their brief encounter with parenthood. She reaches her hand into his and rests her head on his shoulder. Together they gaze at this small reminder of all their dreams that once rested inside the fluttering heart beat that at one time pulsed through those minuscule heels and fueled each tiny toe.

These, the most perfect feet she has ever seen, are now carefully kept in a small velvet box, forever nestled next to her bed. They have bypassed the pale green nursery adjacent to her room, where anxious for their arrival, she always thought they would be. The halls here continually echo empty of their pitter patter. But, event all this time later, these are the feet she stares into before she drifts off to sleep. In her slumber, these are the feet that guide her out, past the recesses of the mind, back into the tall grass leading down to the river. Listening to the water flowing she sits, watching intensely, following every glint of gold in his hair as he dances in the hot morning sun.