

# What to Expect When You're Not Expecting: Miscarriage



by Tom Bartello

On the best of nights, sleep does not come easy, but lying here, finally able to stop, tonight ranks as one of the worst. The constant replay of the last few days' events naturally begins on its own, as if summoned by some force inside with an unrelenting will, refusing to be deterred. I try anyway. Slowly, I release each muscle from tension, working my way through my body, the physical toll of the last week becomes clear.

Looking to Jessi, the relief of my wife's slow, sleepful breathing shifts my thoughts. Thankful for her rest, I am reminded of the different roles we have each endured this week. On top of the barrage of soulful suffering, the physical toll for her seems unfathomable. The pain and anguish of losing a life inside you a fact I can know but will never fully comprehend. The weight of this difference has created a space between us in our grief. Knowing how terrible the loss, while recognizing it is worse for her, somehow convinces me to diminish some of my grief. Hard to name or acknowledge, a loneliness creeps into existence. Isolation begins to consume me as I am finally pulled away from the physical world. Spiraling down, I cascade into a hurricane of fleeting memories. Like a dream, the truth of reality fades. Uncontrollably brought to the forefront, my memories are more than thoughts. Slowly, I am brought back, reliving each daggered moment.

Back in the dimly lit doctor's office, the dark orange color of the room seems to pull the shadows closer, hazing the background of the room. Only Jessi, the nurse, and the monitor remain. I watch the nurse closely, looking for any hint or clue. Then, in a fleeting moment of truth, I see the slightest crack in her demeanor. Her shoulders drop as she begins to turn the screen in our direction. I know what she is going to say, there is no longer a baby inside. The moment you lose hope is a uniquely traumatic experience. Like falling into an endless hole, while the world caves in from all sides. An empty tunnel of nothingness, getting darker and lonelier the deeper I fall. Slipping away, I realize I am holding my breath. As I release it, a familiar numbness takes over. A survival mechanism. My brain and body's quick fix to keep me breathing. I want to feel. I reach for the emotions I know I should have but cannot hold on.

In our bedroom now, I am standing over Jessi. I plead with my thoughts to take me somewhere else. Unable to stand, her body writhing and quaking in pain, Jessi slowly rocks on her knees back and forth. Woken from sleep, the miscarriage decided not to wait until the DNC just a few hours away. I feel useless. Unable to provide relief, I do all that I can. I get down on my knees, put my hand gently on her back and rock with her. We weep together and I whisper, "I love you. I'm here with you."

It is a hard contradiction being angry with God. My faith tells me He answers prayers. He is a healer. He is a provider. I attempt to speak these truths, but they fall short of comfort. In the moment, I am unable to reconcile my reality and my faith, though I sense His presence.

The numbness returns and eventually, body, mind and soul have journeyed as far as a day can take me. Falling away into the quiet darkness, with the last bit of myself left, I look up. There in tangled shadows of sleep I see Him. While His light is faint, the silhouette unmistakable. He reaches out for me with open arms. From the depths, an angry thought rises. Seething into my faded consciousness, it hints, "Why now?" Like a stubborn child, too upset and exhausted to accept a parent's love, I turn away, falling deeper into the darkness. As restlessness finally relents and the darkness consumes my final thoughts, the anger fades away. But, in the last moment before sleep, a gentle voice pierces through the heart of my hopeless cries. He whispers faithfully into my ear, "Rest tonight my child. I am here with you."