

NEIL

Kara, 32, and Robert, 35, a very happily married couple, had a baby four weeks ago. Sadly, they never had the chance to bring their baby home. Kara received glowing reports of her baby's health during the course of the pregnancy, but for some reason, the baby had been terribly overdue. After her doctor induced it, Kara spent thirty agonizing hours in labor. Finally, her obstetrician decided to give her a cesarean section. When baby Neil was born, he could not breathe or function on his own. He survived less than a week in the hospital connected to a ventilator and other medical devices. The doctors told them that there was no hope. The baby would not survive unless he remained on the medical equipment, and eventually the baby would die anyway. Kara and Robert had no choice but to take their Neil off life support. It is a little more than a month after the baby's death.

KARA: You got home early, huh?

ROBERT: My appointment with the Schmidts was over like that. They just wanted to look at this short-term investment plan. They whip through paperwork like no other customers I have. Most geriatric types pore over every *and*, *or*, and *but*.

KARA: Did you pull a fast one on the old folks?

ROBERT: No, I think they tried to pull a fast one on me. They tried to sell me some shares of Schevoka, this start-up their nephew's doing.

KARA: Schevoka?

ROBERT: Exactly. That's what I said. Actually, I couldn't pull a fast one on them. Mrs. Schmidt is either damn lucky or the sharpest investor I know. *(Beat.)* Besides, they were sweet.

KARA: So you told them?

ROBERT: No. They must have heard. Mr. Schmidt and my father both belong to the Kiwanis together.

KARA: Oh.

ROBERT: So you hungry for some spaghetti? I thought it might finally stir your appetite.

KARA: I know you're worried, Robert. I just haven't been hungry. It's not like I'm going to waste away. I think it's even natural. You want some wine?

ROBERT: No. Thanks. I best slow down on that. Don't you want to slow down too?

KARA: No. No reason to slow down. You smell good.

ROBERT: It's the cologne you gave me this summer. *(Starting to rub her shoulders.)* You like it?

KARA: It's nice. Really nice, hon. *(Pause.)* I just . . . so you know . . . I'm not in the mood for anything romantic . . .

ROBERT: I didn't mean to suggest that we'd do anything romantic. I didn't mean to suggest . . . I'm—not in the mood either.

KARA: I know. I just wanted that out there. Ya know?

ROBERT: Sure.

KARA: You're very nice to cook for me every night.

ROBERT: Hey, you eat bon-bons on the couch well. I cook well. We all have to use our strengths in our partnerships.

KARA: Very true. *(Pause.)* Robert, I have something that I should—Hell, why don't I just call it good news. I have good news, Robert.

ROBERT: Yeah? What's that?

KARA: Well . . . well, I quit my job.

ROBERT: *(Pause, perplexed.)* That's good news?

KARA: To me it is.

ROBERT: I don't get it. Why? You never complained about your job.

KARA: That's because I didn't care about my job when I was pregnant. I only cared about Neil. I just wanted something that would allow me flexibility. But now, I just, I don't

know. I realize how mediocre it is. And I don't want to do mediocre most of my day. Besides, I need more time. I just feel depressed about going back. I feel like everything got skipped over. I haven't absorbed it yet. It all feels like this terrible nightmare. Like it never really happened.

ROBERT: What? His death?

KARA: No. His birth. My pregnancy. Us. Everything. Like we never even conceived him. Of course, I know that's not true, but I think it sometimes. I never got to absorb, Robert. Having him. It all happened so fast. God, there were glowing reports on everything and suddenly he's stuck on a million machines. I got to give him one bath and change him, and then suddenly, I'm telling my parents that he won't make it—we have to pull the plug. I'm watching him take his last breath. He kept breathing so much longer than we expected, didn't he? I didn't even cry. I didn't feel anything.

ROBERT: It may take years to deal with it, Kara. That's what they said in the group. In the meantime, you have to stay active.

KARA: I know. And in the meantime, my job seems stupid, and frivolous. Who cares in the larger scheme of things, Robert?

ROBERT: Well, I thought we were working toward buying a house next year? I thought that was important to both of us?

KARA: That was when we thought we needed more space to raise a family. I didn't say I wouldn't get another job. I will. Just give me more time.

ROBERT: Going to work has been great for me. It gets my mind off it. It gives me a sense of routine. I need that for my mental health. That's why I think it will help you.

KARA: Fine! Great! I'm not you! I don't always just "do." (*Beat.*) I don't know. Just so you know, I have been tossing around other possibilities for jobs. I've always had this idea that I might want to go into teaching . . . so I thought I might try substituting.

ROBERT: Do you know how little that pays?

KARA: Yeah. So what? It's not like we can't get by on your salary.

ROBERT: This isn't fair. You don't quit your job without at least discussing it with your husband. It's common decency. I really think I would be a lot more receptive to this if I would have had warning. But just out of the blue? Just give two weeks and quit . . . out of the blue?

KARA: I didn't give them two weeks. I told them this was my last day.

ROBERT: Wonderful.

KARA: I didn't want to work there anymore.

ROBERT: Well, it's not like I want to sit around talking financial management 101 with every customer I have. It's really boring to me too.

KARA: So quit. I swear I won't give you a hard time.

ROBERT: Yeah, right. I know things feel stupid or even miniscule in importance to what's happened to us, but I mean, at some point, Kara, you've got to pick up and . . .

KARA: And what? Move on? Is that what you were going to say? That I need to move on?

ROBERT: No, I wasn't going to say that.

KARA: Good. Cause that sounds like "get over it." Which in case you didn't realize, is pretty hard to do since every bit of my waking life for the last nine months has been in anticipation, in preparation, for my child, our child.

ROBERT: I know. I know.

KARA: I prepared every day for what we'd do . . . how we'd celebrate Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas. I'd think about how I'd wake him or he'd wake me every morning. We'd be all sleepy-eyed and cranky. Don't you ever think about those things?

ROBERT: (*Looking down.*) I try not to actually.

KARA: Every day I go into his bedroom to look at everything. I want to see that it was real. That he was real. You never go anywhere near his bedroom.

ROBERT: I can't.

KARA: Well, I can't help but go in there. I need to feel every-
thing, Robert, not just go back to work and pretend it never
happened. Priorities feel different. Other things have taken
on more importance.

ROBERT: Like what? Being online?

KARA: Why does that irritate you so much?

ROBERT: Because I don't understand why you want to keep
torturing yourself with all those women—listening to all
that crap about their newborns . . . what they're doing, how
they smile or coo or whatever. Doesn't that drive you crazy?

KARA: Yes, but at the same time, we all were so excited for
our babies—we bonded . . . I don't know. They're good to
talk to. Maybe I need them to give me hope. To say I could
have a—okay, maybe it's a little like torture.

ROBERT: You don't even know those people, Kara. Why
would you have to talk to them? You never even met them.
You have real friends in life.

KARA: Yes, I have friends in life, but most of them don't even
call and ask me how I'm doing. I know they're afraid they
are going to upset me by bringing it up, but it's not like I'm
thinking about anything else. So just talk to me. But they
don't. So I talk to these women online. At least, they give
me support and hope. Hell, at least they talk about it.
They're willing to talk about it, which is more than you do.

ROBERT: I talk about it. We've talked about it so much. There
is nothing more I can say right now.

KARA: You cook for me, and you hold my hand, and you take
care of me, but you don't talk about him. I need to talk
about him.

ROBERT: Sometimes I don't know what to say. No words
come.

KARA: I feel like there's this stuff underneath that you don't
say. Like you're thinking something about . . . things but
you don't say it. This whole week you just shut the door
and watched TV.

ROBERT: It had nothing to do with you. I just need to shut
down sometimes.

KARA: It's bad enough that we lost our son, but now I feel like
I'm losing you. We can't even communicate anymore. I just
don't understand how you don't need to talk about him all
the time because I do. So then when I bring him up, I feel
like I'm bringing you down.

ROBERT: I don't feel that. I don't.

KARA: I don't want to forget him! Ever!

ROBERT: I don't either!

KARA: I was proud of him.

ROBERT: So was I!

KARA: So why didn't you tell me that?

ROBERT: I thought it would make you feel worse.

KARA: How could I feel worse? We had him, and we lost him.
But we *had* him. We should be doing as other parents do—
bragging about our child shamelessly. Instead we're in
silence. You always with your head down like we should
be ashamed. *(She folds over.)* Uhhh. *(Sighs.)* It's just my
stomach again.

ROBERT: Maybe this whole talk is making you sick.

KARA: No. It's not making me sick. I want to talk about it. I
want to say I'm in pain. I don't feel like eating, and maybe
I am drinking too much, but what do you expect?

ROBERT: I just don't feel comfortable with the whole drink-
ing thing.

KARA: And the TV isn't your drug of choice? We all have our
drugs. Look, Robert, I don't always do things neat and easy
like you. I'm messy. Occasionally, completely unreasonable.
But you knew I was like that when you married me. I didn't
pull any surprises on you. I want to scream at the top of
my lungs at some of our friends who never came to see him.
I screamed at Lucy today. And you know what? It scared
her to death. I didn't care. She's supposed to be one of my
closest friends and she wasn't there.

ROBERT: I think she didn't know what was proper. The same with George. They felt awkward.

KARA: Well, screw awkward! Life's awkward. Ignoring us or not calling us for weeks is awkward. It makes it all the worse. You know it too. Why do you have to be so damn diplomatic and forgiving of people? Doesn't anything ever piss you off?

ROBERT: *(Thinking.)* His dying pissed me off.

KARA: At me?

ROBERT: *(Taken aback.)* What?! Of course not!

KARA: Cause I kept thinking you might blame me for not insisting about the C-section earlier.

ROBERT: And that's your fault?!

KARA: I don't know. I guess I thought that—maybe thought that—

ROBERT: No. If anything, I was angry at *me* for not demanding more from the doctor. I'm supposed to protect you . . . so is he. Here you were exhausted and obviously suffering and I should have said something. I should have demanded more from Dr. Barton.

KARA: Let's just say "Dr. Barton SUCKS" real loud.

ROBERT: Why?

KARA: Don't think. Just do for once. Will you? We can count to five and scream like crazy.

ROBERT: I don't think I can.

KARA: He's not here. We won't hurt his feelings. Let's scream it continuously. As loud as we can. One, two, three.
(Counting off with her fingers. Kara encourages him.)

ROBERT/KARA: Dr. Barton Sucks! Dr. Barton Sucks! Dr. Barton Sucks! Dr. Barrrrrrrrtoooooonnnn Suuuuuuuuuucks!

KARA: *(Starts singing.)* Dr. Barton Suuuuuuuccckkkkkks! Dr. Barton Succckkkkkssss

ROBERT: *(Yelling now.)* Succckkkkkkkkkks. *(It grows in pitch to a real scream. He collapses.)*
(Kara stares for a moment—shocked by his outpouring.)

KARA: *(Long pause.)* Robert . . . ?

ROBERT: I'm fine. *(He stands.)* I'm sorry.

KARA: No. Don't be. It sounds stupid, but I think I heard you in that. *(Beat.)* Are you okay? Are you crying?

ROBERT: *(Turns.)* No. I only cry on the trains to and from work.

KARA: What?

ROBERT: I cry on the train. Behind my paper. I've done it for the past two weeks. I didn't tell you.

KARA: Why not?

ROBERT: I was supposed to stay strong. I wanted to stay strong.

KARA: Oh Robert. You don't have to be strong. You are strong.

ROBERT: It's safe with nobody I know there. I pass the places I would have taken him—the ballpark. I think about the places I've been in my life, and everything I've ever wanted passes by in the window and he, my beautiful son . . . passes . . . in the window . . . Then I just start . . . I never intend on it.

KARA: It's okay. *(She hugs him.)* I understand.

ROBERT: Do you think we will ever be happy again?

KARA: Yeah. We will. *(Pause.)* I love you, Robert.