

A WOMAN'S CHOICE

Luke, 24, discovered recently that his 18-year-old wife was several months pregnant and considering an abortion. He was shocked. Despite the fact that the child was unplanned and their relationship was tense, he desperately wanted this baby. He spent a lot of time convincing his wife, Kat, that this would rebuild their relationship. He took on a second job so they could save money for the baby and put a down payment on a house. It seemed he had convinced her that having the baby would be the best for everyone. But, last week, with no warning, Luke's wife went into a Planned Family Center and aborted it. When Kat told him, Luke went crazy. Kat took off to stay with her sister in Florida. Luke made several threatening phone calls to the abortion center, angrily accusing the counselor of coercing his wife. Luke impulsively decides to confront the counselor in person when he sees her leaving the center late this evening. Jessie, 27, is struggling to break free as Luke pushes her into the lobby.

LUKE: Ow! *(Suddenly pulling his hand away.)* Stop it! *(Pushing her into the room.)* Relax! I just want to talk to you. I'm not going to do anything.

JESSIE: *(Fearfully.)* Please, please. Please don't—

LUKE: I'm not going to hurt you. I just wanted to talk to you in person. That's all. I swear!

JESSIE: Well, then let go of me. *(He does.)* I know you're upset. I can see that. But if you just want to talk, why are you pushing me?

LUKE: I'm not going to do anything but talk to you.

JESSIE: Okay, okay. But the facility is . . . What's your name?

LUKE: Luke.

JESSIE: Okay, Luke, I was just going to say that the facility is closed. I'd be happy to talk to you tomorrow.

LUKE: But on the phone you said you couldn't talk to me. Or maybe you just wouldn't. You couldn't tell me anything you said. That made me so angry because my wife, won't talk to me either. She's suddenly in Florida with her sister.

JESSIE: Look, I'm sorry that you and your wife are having problems, but we don't get involved in our clients' personal lives.

LUKE: You tell her to kill my child and then leave me? You call that not getting involved in our personal lives?

JESSIE: I can assure you that no one here told her any such thing. And while it is true that I am not at liberty to discuss individual cases, I can clarify what we do here so there's no misunderstanding. I see how upset you are. And I'm sympathetic. I can arrange counseling for you if you'd like. I'd be happy to help you tomorrow.

LUKE: Not tomorrow! Tonight! I want to get some peace on this tonight. Do you know how crazy I've been at the shop? I may lose one of my jobs because of all this. I've been working all hours, trying to get the cash together. And I don't need counseling from you! I see how you people counsel. Last week my wife tells me she loves me and agrees about our baby, and the next thing I know, she talks to you and my child's dead.

JESSIE: The security guard will be here any minute. He must be running late. He'd have called the police by now. But I won't. I won't call the police, and I'll convince him not to as well. As long as you go quietly back through that front door, and come back tomorrow to discuss this rationally with me.

LUKE: I'm not coming tomorrow. I want to talk now! And the security guard isn't late.

JESSIE: What do you mean?

LUKE: I mean, he's in my van. He's in my van as we speak.

JESSIE: What?

LUKE: Don't get all crazy on me. He's fine. I have him in my van. He's not dead or anything! (*She looks horrified. He reacts.*) I put the radio on for him. Don't act like that! I had to tie him up. He's fine. He's not hurt. He stopped me in the parking lot. I had no choice. I needed to talk with you face-to-face. That's all. Is that too much to ask? To try to understand. To tell you how wrong you were. How you've ruined my life!

JESSIE: Look, I know you're furious and hurt about this situation, Luke. But you are making a terrible mistake. This is going to get you in a lot of trouble. You could wind up doing time.

LUKE: What did you say to her? Just tell me what you said to her that day. I need to know. And then I'll let you both go.

JESSIE: About what specifically?

LUKE: About me. About keeping the baby.

JESSIE: I didn't say anything to her. I just talk to them about their options.

LUKE: You're the main counselor here, right?

JESSIE: This is not a counseling center. I'm not a therapist. I'm studying to be a nurse. This facility is for women's gynecological care, birth control, and abortion.

LUKE: I know what you do here. I'm not stupid.

JESSIE: We counsel by giving facts and options prior to the procedure. We also help with referrals afterwards if a woman would like one-on-one counseling. But I don't get to know these women. I meet them for only a few hours in a group.

LUKE: So how can you tell them what to do then?! How dare you!

JESSIE: I don't! I don't make their decisions. I don't tell anyone what to do. I deal with a lot of women here every day. (*Cringes.*) I, I don't even know who your wife is exactly. I think I have an idea, but I'm not entirely sure.

LUKE: Well that's even worse! You don't know who she is, but you tell her to have an abortion? To leave me? Did she describe me as some crazed guy who flies off the handle? I

don't know what happened. Everything changed suddenly. She got so cold. I have a bad temper, yes. But I've never hit her!

JESSIE: I can't discuss this as I told you. All I can say is that I'm here to give the women the facts. That's all.

LUKE: Yeah? The facts? Did you tell her that at seven weeks, our baby was sucking his thumb? He drinks too and sleeps and wakes up and gets bored. I've been reading a lot these last few weeks. I've been doing lots of things to prepare. A baby is responsive to pain at seven weeks . . . to touch and cold and sound and light and stuff. That baby would feel the pain of it. Did you tell her all that?

JESSIE: Yes. Sort of.

LUKE: Sort of?

JESSIE: They watch a film. They can see the development of the fetus at several stages.

LUKE: That's how you get out of it, right? You call it a fetus instead of a baby. Fetus sounds so inhuman, like an alien or a fish.

JESSIE: I discuss their options, the possible outcomes, emotionally and physically, of the procedure. Then we leave them alone in a room to decide.

LUKE: But there's a kind of pressure in that room, isn't there? Especially if the woman's young, like my wife. There's a kind of stuck-up-ness if the girl hasn't gone to college. Or if she has any doubt about her husband. I know I get angry, but I'm a good man. I wanted this child. I loved this child. But you people made her scared. Made her think we couldn't handle it. Pressured her into thinking I couldn't handle it.

JESSIE: If there's any pressure, it's the other way around. There's more pressure to convince them *not* to have an abortion. They are given a lot of other options.

LUKE: Well, if that were true, then why is it that Planned Family is performing more abortions in the U.S. than any

other facility? It's commercialization. It's the money. That's why!

JESSIE: No, I couldn't disagree with you more. It's safe here. And affordable. Planned Family's been here for the last thirty to forty years when other places haven't. Maybe it's because it's a place where women can be treated fairly and with dignity no matter what their choice. A place where their wishes are respected.

LUKE: Wishes? Dignity? Someone opens you up and pulls out the pieces of your living child. That's dignity?

JESSIE: *(Gesturing to the door.)* Why don't we go see how the security guard is doing? I don't think this conversation is getting us anywhere.

LUKE: *(Blocking the door.)* I'll be the judge of that. *(Beat.)* Are you a lesbian or something?

JESSIE: What?!

LUKE: I said are you a lesbian or something? Do you hate men or something?

JESSIE: No, I don't hate men.

LUKE: But you're a lesbian?

JESSIE: No, I'm not a lesbian! And why would that make any difference?

LUKE: Because you don't seem to understand that it's not *just* the woman's choice. You don't see any reason to talk to the father about this, do you? Morally? Asking him? Giving him a choice? It was part of my body too! And I'm her husband. Not just some random guy. Her husband. This was my child, my body, my future. But I have no say. I don't even have to be notified, right? I don't even have to be notified that it is going to happen. That you'll kill him. Right? *(Beat.)* Answer me. Right?

JESSIE: *(Beat.)* That's right.

LUKE: I took on a second shift at the factory to try to save up for a house for us. I started to build a baby bed. *(Pause.)* See, I don't have a family. My mom died last year. She was

never much of a mother. I thought this would be my family. That we would be a family.

JESSIE: Look, the longer he stays out there, the worse the situation will be for you.

LUKE: You keep acting like you're thinking of me, but you're not. You're a liar.

JESSIE: I'm not lying. You will be put in jail for this. And they won't be sympathetic about what you've done. Why don't you call the police now and apologize? *(She gestures, heading for the door.)* Come on, why don't we just go out and check on him?

LUKE: No! *(Grabbing her tightly.)* I don't think you understand.

JESSIE: *(Frightened.)* Ow!

LUKE: You're not listening to me. I'm trying to talk to you here.

JESSIE: What is it you want me to understand?

LUKE: I called you this afternoon to make you uncomfortable. Nowhere near the pain I'm feeling, but at least some guilt or regret. But it's too easy here. You don't understand the pain you cause. You hand women the papers. Sign away. And rip out another life. Just work. Just routine, right?

JESSIE: No.

LUKE: Even if you don't believe in God or a soul, you must admit that this glob or mass or fetus, as you call it, is unique. He's got eyes and a nose—he's human. Did you know that nothing new will be added from the time of the fertilization until the death of the old man or woman except that he'll grow and the mind will develop? But nothing new will be added? How is this "fetus" not human?

JESSIE: It's not that I don't understand your position, Luke. I can see your point of view, and you have every right to it. But what you're doing here, to me, to the security guard is not just disagreeing. It's fanatical.

LUKE: Is it fanatical to stop people from killing people? Then I guess I'm a fanatic. I just have this really stupid idea that life is precious.

JESSIE: You don't think anyone here agrees with you? I think life is precious!

LUKE: Then act like it!

JESSIE: The women who become pregnant are just as precious as the unborn. It's not some easy, snap decision they make. Some mothers just can't do it.

LUKE: So put the child up for adoption.

JESSIE: I knew you'd say that sooner or later. But what if they don't get adopted, which happens all the time? Then the child's left to this random system of ours that sucks them into foster care where they never escape.

LUKE: But they could escape. Some escape. Some get past their upbringing, creating things in this world. Building things, making masterpieces, music, changing the way we see stuff.

JESSIE: Yes, but some of these women are physically unable to carry a child. They may be suffering from dangerous addictions or diseases. They don't want to pass that on. Others find it too painful—physically or emotionally. They just can't do it.

LUKE: Oh, well fine then! Let's kill it by all means. It's really inconvenient. People find their aging, sick parents inconvenient. Should we kill them too?

JESSIE: Don't be ridiculous! I'm talking about complex situations.

LUKE: Like what?

JESSIE: Like rape for instance.

LUKE: Well, that has nothing to do with my situation! That has nothing to do with my child.

JESSIE: So you agree with abortion in instances of rape?

LUKE: I don't want to argue with you anymore! I want to know why you told her I'd be a bad father! I want you to feel pain for what you've done!

JESSIE: (*Snaps back angrily.*) What have I done?! Huh?!

LUKE: (*Grabs her hard.*) I could kill you with my bare hands for what you've done.

JESSIE: Then kill me. Do it. Go ahead. (*He's shocked by her*

behavior.) I will not be a victim anymore. I promised myself that. So if you want to kill me, go right ahead.

LUKE: I didn't mean . . . I don't . . . I'm angry, but I . . . (*He starts to let go of Jessie's arms.*) I don't want to hurt you. I just . . . I just don't understand how Kat could do this to our baby.

JESSIE: Kat? That's her name? (*He nods.*) I just remembered who she is. (*Beat. Sighs.*) Luke, did it ever occur to you that your wife may have had a difficult reason for wanting to abort her child?

LUKE: What are you talking about?

JESSIE: Things you weren't supposed to know. Things I know all too well myself.

LUKE: I don't understand. What are you saying? Look at me.

JESSIE: (*Turns.*) Some women who are raped get ashamed. They don't tell right away. (*Beat.*) I know. I was young when it happened too.

LUKE: You were . . . ?

JESSIE: (*She nods.*) A frat boy. From my college. We had been drinking, so even though I said no repeatedly, it had to be my fault. I went to his place after all. Right as I was starting to bury the incident, I realized I was pregnant. I went to some local place that advertised help for young pregnant women. It turned out to be a front for some pro-life fanatics who kept telling me I'd turn into a Hitler-type if I murdered my baby. I told my two best friends and they just assumed I would definitely abort. Get rid of that filthy thing. So I could go on with school and forget it. (*Beat.*) It wasn't until I came to a place just like this one. The woman there just told me the facts. Told me the potential outcomes, gave me a lot to read, and left me alone to decide. On my own.

LUKE: Why are you telling me all this? What are you trying to say?

JESSIE: When someone violates you, you have to take control of things. Sometimes you shut out the people you love the

most. Out of shame. You can't bear to have any reminders of what happened, even if that means that you must suffer great losses.

LUKE: Are you trying to tell me that my Kat was raped? (Pause.) By who? (Beat.) How? She never . . . but she never . . .

JESSIE: You talk about how precious life is to you, but isn't she precious—your wife? Don't you trust her to know what's best for her? Or would you prefer to force and pressure? You say life is precious but you grab an innocent man and throw him in your car because he gets in your way. You threaten a woman who you don't even know because she doesn't agree with your point of view. What is your moral responsibility? Do your actions have consequences? Were you showing us how precious we all are? Did it ever occur to you that your wife was hurting?

LUKE: I didn't . . . know. She never . . . that's why . . . (Beat. Quietly.) I'm sorry.

JESSIE: Then you'll get help for your temper. And you'll talk to her gently. And when you see her again, you'll hold her because she's been through a lot. But you won't let on what you know. (He nods.) In time, she may tell you. (Beat.) Now, if you don't mind, we have to call the police so we can file a report on this. I'll go to the station after I pick up my son. But you have a man to untie first. Right?

LUKE: (He nods.) Yeah. (Beat.) Did you say you have a son? (She nods.) Do you mind telling me if he was . . . if he was conceived from your—

JESSIE : Yes. I mind. It's none of your business. Besides, what does it matter?

NO-FAULT

Keith's father died three days ago of a heart attack. He had taken his son, Keith, out driving so the boy could get in enough practice hours to get his license. Keith's father was always a bit nervous about being a passenger. On every turn, his father would give Keith advice as he gripped the arm rest tightly. A few nights ago though, Keith's father was unusually quiet as Keith drove. When asked what was wrong, his father told Keith that he had some pains in his chest. Once he heard this, Keith suggested they go to the emergency room right away, but Keith's father brushed it off, saying he was fine. Keith really did want to keep driving. He wanted to practice parallel parking in the lot behind the church. It wasn't until they were on the way home that the pains got worse. Soon Keith's father slumped over. In an absolute panic, Keith stopped the car and flagged down help. By the time the EMS arrived, Keith was sobbing. Though they tried repeatedly to revive his father, he was pronounced dead that night. Since then, Keith has barely spoken. His mother and sister were devastated and shocked. It is now the first day of the viewing at the funeral home. Keith stands outside of the doors afraid to look at his father's body in the open casket. He sits in silence when Jude, his 18-year-old sister, approaches him.

JUDE: (Long pause.) So . . . How ya doin'?

KEITH: (Quietly.) All right.

JUDE: Liar. I don't know why I'm asking you that. People have been asking me that all day, and all I feel like screaming back is, "How the hell do you *think* I'm doing?!" (Sighs.)

This dress is ugly. I look like a saggy immigrant, don't I?

KEITH: You look fine.