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AT HARDWARE STORES

IN THE BEGINNING

How does one accept the loss of a child?

The First Week

I don't want to wake up; staying asleep is so safe. Once up, thoughts are aimless and I wander through the house. I can't seem to touch down into the real world, even now. So little seems important anymore. Will there ever be a purpose again?

How lost and alone I feel — completely empty. I need something to touch, something to hold onto. Hugging Alex's teddy bear close, there is some sense of closeness to him, some comfort. Slowly moving, aimlessly walking, back and forth, one side of the room to the other. I don't seem to be going anywhere, yet I keep moving, clasping and unclasping my hands.

In the kitchen we are assembled. I should think of making breakfast . . . or is it lunch? I know we have food. Friends have brought an endless supply to last for weeks. All I need do is open the refrigerator and take out the first thing I see. Why can't I do that? I should get forks, knives, but the silverware drawer is empty. My control is slipping and despair washes over me. We must eat, but there is no silverware, and I don't know what to do about it. Someone washes a pile of dirty forks — is it me?

The Second Week

A milestone for us, the end of that first week. Will every Saturday hereafter become a morbid reminder? Our daughter is involved in a folk dance festival downtown. We have no desire to attend, but it is important for her that we go. Walking in without Alexander, friends are watching us. Embarrassment is one emotion that we had not anticipated as part of the grief process. All eyes are upon us. We don't know how to act, exactly what is expected of us. Others, too, are not sure what to say. I hate the silence, but too many words can bring unwelcome tears in public.

Sitting those two hours gives me a chance to skip into that faraway state where my mind reruns the story start to finish. Like a movie, I see each part replayed again and again. Alex still and not breathing, Alex limp and cool in the dimly lit hospital room, Alex lying pink and cold on the mortuary table, Alex lying in his casket dressed in his red sailor suit. Each segment presents itself for me to analyze, to pick apart, to reconcile in my mind. But the vision of him lying still and dead in his casket is with me most consistently. The shock is so profound

that I have to relive it a thousand times over till I can convince myself that it is real.

Sunday brings church and we will be going for the first time since Alexander's funeral. The readings, the sermon, all sound too neat and tidy, too foolish to be believable. What made sense to me before makes no sense now. How can they continue to say



Alex: a sweet memory.

those same things with Alexander dead and buried? Don't they know that all has changed, that nothing is the same?

And with the day nearly done, I already face thoughts of tomorrow when the children will go off to school, and my husband off to work, leaving me totally alone with no baby to care for. Not for 12 years have I been totally alone, nor was I prepared to be alone for many years to come. The reality of an empty house will be too much for me. I know that I won't be able to face it tomorrow — or for a long time.

Waking in the morning, it is apparent that this will be the worst day that I've experienced since Alexander's death. I feel out of control, totally unable to cope. There is panic in the air. I have to get out of the house, cannot remain here for a moment after the children are gone. But what do I do — where will I go? The February roads are still slick and icy. It would be foolish to try to drive too far. I'm scheduled to work in the school library one hour this morning. That leaves only five more lonely hours to