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Jessica Oja Rohloff

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Choices

by Jessica Oja Rohloff

I met him for the first time when I took my car in to the shop to get it fixed. I was not happy. My car had been making a weird clunking noise for weeks, but I had decided to ignore it. Then the stupid thing finally quit on me.

I had seen him before. He was a friend of one of my close friends, but I'd never really talked to him or anything. The first thing I noticed when he was talking to me that day was how blue his eyes were. I'd never seen anything like them before. They reminded me what the sky must look like in Alaska. Pale blue against the white of the snow on the mountains.

"So what's the problem?" he asked.

"I have no idea," I said. "It just wouldn't start this morning, so I had no ride to school. Can you have it fixed by tomorrow?"

He looked at the engine, poked around at a couple of parts that looked completely useless to me, while I stood there and watched. "Yeah, it's nothing major, you can pick it up tomorrow," he finally answered.

My best friend gave me a ride home. I sat staring out the window, watching all the trees and buildings in our small California town go by. We drove near the ocean, like always. My friends and I like to drive on the highway that is closest to the water because we love to be as near to the ocean as possible. It's a little bit out of the way, but definitely worth it.

I kept thinking about him, and the way he seemed to see right into me. We only talked about my car, not exactly the stuff of romance novels, but I

was quite taken by him. I just couldn't get over his eyes.

"Hey, Natalie," I asked my friend. "How well do you know Steve?"

"Pretty well," she said. "Why?"

"Oh...I don't know." I was still staring off into space.

"You like him, don't you?" she asked.

"No. I don't know."

"He's like twenty," said Natalie. "What would your parents say?"

"I don't even think I really like him. Forget I asked you that, okay?"

Later that night I found myself thinking about him still. I couldn't concentrate on my homework. I kept picturing his eyes, and the way he smiled. I was startled out of my daydreaming by the phone ringing.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is Skye there?" came a male voice.

"This is," I said. Then I sat there and waited for an answer.

"Uh ... this is Steve."

"Steve who?" That was a stupid question. I knew exactly who it was. Or at least, I hoped so. I got a weird feeling in my stomach. I got all nervous for some reason. Usually stuff like that doesn't happen to me.

"Remember, I'm fixing your car," he said.

I was disappointed. I thought maybe he called because he wanted to talk to me. "Oh, is there something else wrong with it?" I asked.

"No," Steve said. "Actually, I was just calling to see what you were doing."

He was nervous. My heart soared. Maybe he liked me! I was glad he was nervous, it made me feel better since I was so nervous I could hardly think. My palms had started sweating, and I could barely talk. All this over a guy. What was wrong with me?

There was a long silence, then he said, "I'm sorry. I probably shouldn't have called. Natalie gave me your number."

"No, no, it's okay," I said. I wanted to talk to him. I just had no idea what to say. "So, um..."

And so went the conversation. We didn't say a lot, and there were a lot of awkward silences, but I was so flattered that he called. I hung up the

phone with this huge, stupid grin on my face.

A few minutes after we hung up, my mom knocked on my door and came in. I always yelled at her for doing that. I want her to wait until I tell her to come in, but she never listens. "Who was on the phone?" she asked.

"Steve from the car place," I said.

"Steve *Mitchell*?"

"Yeah, that's him."

"Why is he calling here? Was it something about the car? Is there something wrong?"

"No, he just called ... to talk," I said.

"Well, I don't want him calling here anymore. "He's twenty years old, his dad is an alcoholic, and he probably is too. You don't need to associate with losers like that." Then she left.

That really upset me. I hate it when my mom acts like that. She doesn't even know him. All she knows is what she's heard about his family. Well, I guess I didn't really know him either, but still. I didn't like that she was so quick to judge someone that she'd never met.

I didn't see him again for a long time, because he wasn't there when I went to pick up my car. He called me a few times over the next couple of weeks. Luckily he called when my parents weren't home. I eventually told him about my mom and dad (I got the same speech from my dad the day that my mom yelled at me). He completely understood. I think it kind of hurt him to be judged because of his parents, but he said it's been that way his whole life. So I think that was why he never asked me out or anything. He knew that I wouldn't be allowed to see him.

So far, the only relationship we had was on the phone. We talked about a lot, but we'd only really seen each other the day I brought my car into the shop. The first time we ever spent time together, it was in the middle of the night. My friend Katie and I were going for a walk one day when Steve and his friend Matt drove by us. They saw who we were, so they turned around to talk to us. We stood around and talked for a while, not really about anything important. Then Matt asked us what we were doing that night.

"Like, when?" I asked.

"Oh, about twelve o'clock or so...." said Matt.

"What do you mean?" asked Katie.

"Do you guys want to sneak out?" asked Matt. "We'll come and pick you up."

We thought about it for a while, and then decided it could be fun. We were spending the night at Katie's house, and her mom would never know. And if we got caught, we could just say that we were up late and it was nice out, so we decided to go for a walk. She'd never have to know the real reason we were out in the middle of the night.

So we made plans to meet on a dirt road by Katie's house at midnight. It was only about noon when we made these plans, so I spent all day thinking about it. I was excited! I'd finally get to spend some time with Steve! I wondered what we would do. I wondered if he would kiss me. I spent all day wondering what would happen, making up stories in my head. It was a long day.

Finally it was midnight and time to leave. I was so nervous. I was so sure we'd get caught. We went out Katie's bedroom window, because it didn't have a screen, and it was low to the ground. We made a lot of noise. I was sure we were going to get caught.

Once we were outside, I wasn't so nervous. It was a warm night. I was wearing my favorite denim shorts and a white tee-shirt. I was getting that funny feeling in my stomach again. I wasn't paranoid about getting caught anymore, but I was nervous about seeing Steve. Maybe once he spent time with me, he wouldn't like me anymore. I didn't know how to act around him.

It only took about two minutes for us to walk to the spot where we were supposed to meet Steve and Matt. They were already there. They were sitting in Matt's truck, waiting for us. There really wasn't enough room for all four of us in the truck, so since Matt was driving, Steve made me sit on his lap.

"No, I don't want to. I'll squash you," I said.

"No you won't. You weigh, what, a hundred pounds?" and he pulled

me on top of him.

He had his arms around me the whole time. Even though I didn't really know him, it felt good, and I was comfortable with it. He seemed to like it too. Whenever we went around a corner, he'd hold me tighter. Matt was kind of a crazy driver, and Steve didn't want me to get hurt.

We drove down to this spot on a river that I'd never been to before. It was in the woods, but there was a little clearing where we parked the truck. It was so nice out. I couldn't get over what a perfect night it was. There was a warm breeze, and even from where we were, there was a scent of the ocean in the air. The moon was so beautiful peeking through the trees, and I'd never seen so many stars in my life. We were far enough from the city that the lights didn't block out the stars.

Eventually Katie and Matt went for a walk in the woods and left us alone. They had hit it off right away. So they took off on this trail that went along the riverbank. The moon was bright enough so they could see where they were going without a flashlight.

Steve and I spent the whole time talking. We sat in the back of Matt's pickup truck and watched the lightning bugs. Eventually, we lay down and looked at the stars. He had his arm around me, and my head was lying on his chest. We pointed out to each other the constellations that we knew. He knew a lot of them. I'd always been interested in astronomy, but I'd never really taken the time to learn many constellations. I was surprised how much he knew.

Finally Matt and Katie came back. Their hair was kind of messed up, and they both had this look of satisfaction on their faces. Steve and I laughed out loud when we saw them. They were so cute together.

It was getting late, so Matt drove us home. I sat on Steve's lap again, and I was even more comfortable than I was on the way there. I felt like I'd known him forever, and this was the first time we'd ever really been together.

When they dropped us off, Matt and Katie got out of the truck. I got out, and turned to look at Steve.

"I had fun," I said.

"Me too." He looked at me with those gorgeous blue eyes of his. I once again got the feeling that he was looking not really at me, but *into* me.

It was a bit unnerving at first, but now it was a good feeling.

We stared at each other for a minute, but to me, it felt like forever. Finally he cupped my face in his hands, and brought his lips down to mine. He hadn't tried anything on me all night, and this was our first kiss. Any other guy would have taken advantage of the situation, having a girl alone in the woods in the middle of the night. When you think about it, it was actually a pretty stupid thing for Katie and me to do. They very easily could have hurt or raped us. We didn't know them that well. We had no reason to trust them. Luckily nothing like that happened. I didn't ever think it would. The fact that he didn't try anything all night made me feel like he respected me. I was really surprised, considering our age difference. I was only sixteen, and he was twenty. I would have thought he would want to move faster than he did.

School was still in session, so we only saw each other on the weekends. Sneaking out became a regular thing for Katie and me. Every Friday and Saturday night we would sneak out to see Matt and Steve. Things didn't work out that well between Matt and Katie. They liked each other, but not that much. Some nights they would sit there and make out, and others they would fight. Steve and I kept getting closer and closer. I learned a lot about him. He told me about his childhood, and how it wasn't very pleasant. His parents physically and emotionally abused him. Especially his dad. He'd never really been close to anyone before, but he told me that he felt close to me. It made me feel good. I loved being there for him. I felt like I could talk to him about anything, too. And I did. We would sit for hours and just hold each other and talk.

The nights that we went out weren't always that boring though. One particularly warm night, we decided to go swimming in the river. The water was warm, and the current was slow, so it was a lot of fun. Then Matt decided to be cool and jump off the bridge that spanned the river near the place where we were swimming. The first time he did it, he made it to the water without incident. The second time, though, was a different story. I wasn't really paying attention to what he was doing, I was too busy laughing with Katie about Matt's swimming trunks. They were purple and covered with flowers. He told us his mom had picked them out for him. Anyway,

we weren't watching what he was doing, when suddenly we heard, "HELLLLLPPP!!"

I looked up at the bridge, and sure enough, there was Matt, hanging off the bridge by his shorts. I was scared at first, but once I realized he was okay, I couldn't stop laughing. Apparently he had climbed over the side of the bridge, and was balancing on the little ledge that you had to stand on before you jumped, when he slipped. His shorts got caught on a bolt sticking out from the bridge and it held him there. Steve ran up on the bridge to try to help him, but there wasn't anything he could do. He couldn't reach Matt because the railing was in the way, and he couldn't balance on the ledge and pull Matt up at the same time. So Matt had to hang there until his shorts finally tore and let him fall to the water where he proceeded to do a flip before he landed flat on his stomach in the water. He was now naked, and even though it was dark, Katie and I got a good view of his white butt as he ran up to the truck.

Finally school let out, and I could see Steve almost every night. He never really asked me out, but I knew he considered me to be his girlfriend. I didn't mind at all. I'd never liked anyone as much as I liked him. I really felt like he cared about me, and he was the only guy that I ever felt respected by. Katie and Steve eventually stopped going with us, so Steve and I spent some time alone. Most nights we would go to the beach, and sit and look at the ocean and stars. Sometimes we would swim, sometimes we would go for walks. It was hard having a boyfriend that I couldn't tell my parents about. I had to lie all the time, and I never got to bed until about five a.m. But I didn't care. It was worth it. I had never been in love before, but I knew I loved Steve. And I knew he loved me, too. I've never been the kind of person to trust people. I was always so afraid of getting hurt. It felt so good to let all that go. To trust, be trusted, love, and be loved. I had never imagined a guy could make me so happy. My experiences with guys had always been bad.

I trusted Steve so much, and I cared about him so much, that he ended up being the guy I lost my virginity to. I'd had many chances in the past to have sex, but I always chose not to. I knew Steve respected me, and that he

truly cared about me, so I wanted him to be the one. I had always been taught to wait until marriage for things like that. But it was my body, my choice, and I felt like I was ready. We didn't use protection, but I wasn't worried about it. I never really thought much about STD's or getting pregnant. I just figured that wouldn't happen to me. I thought teachers and other adults were just being paranoid, and didn't want us having sex at all, so they used those things to try to get us not to. I realize that I should have thought everything out before I decided to start having sex. But I guess it's too late now.

I didn't know I was pregnant for about two months. I was sort of in denial about it. I thought I had the flu or something, and that was why I always threw up in the mornings. My periods had always been irregular. One time before I became sexually active, I skipped three months for no apparent reason. So I just tried not to think about it. I just sort of pushed the thought to the back of my head, not letting myself believe it. I had no idea what I would do if I ever got pregnant. I didn't want to worry about it, because I was so sure that it would never happen to me.

I didn't really even give the idea serious thought until I read something in a magazine that made me consider the fact that I very well could be pregnant. There was an article in it about a girl who got pregnant, and never told anyone. There was a little table that told signs of pregnancy, and when I read it, I realized that I had over half of the symptoms. I finally decided to go out and buy a pregnancy test. I didn't tell *anyone* about it, not even Steve. I couldn't face up to it. I thought that if I said it out loud, then that would make it come true. So I kept it a secret from everyone.

I got home from the store after buying the test, and did exactly what the directions said to do. I locked myself in the bathroom, even though I was home alone. Both of my parents were out somewhere. I waited the ten minutes. When I saw the blue line that indicated pregnancy, I went into a state of shock. I just sat in the bathroom, not moving, not really even thinking, for a full half hour. Then I went into denial again. I drove all the way back to the store to buy another one. I figured I must have messed up or something.

I got the same result from the second pregnancy test. I couldn't

believe it. It couldn't be true. How could this happen to me? It's not like I slept around or anything. I knew lots of girls who did, and this never happened to them. Why me? And what was I going to do? I couldn't tell my parents. They still didn't even know that I *talked* to Steve. I knew that they would press charges on him. My parents are like that. And then he would go to jail and it would be all my fault. I loved him so much, but I kind of blamed him for this happening to me.

I called Steve right away, and told him to pick me up. I didn't even care if my parents happened to come home. I needed to talk to him. I was sure he'd know what to do. I couldn't face any of my friends with something like this, and he was the only one I could turn to.

He picked me up, and we drove down to the spot on the river that we went to the first night that Katie and I ever snuck out. He knew something was wrong, but I didn't tell him what on the phone. I was still too upset, and I knew I'd break down if I told him right then. I needed time to sort out my thoughts and feelings. I needed to be calm and think the whole thing through. I also wanted to be with him when I told him the news. I was so scared, I didn't know how he'd take it.

We got out of his car, and sat down on a grassy hill sloping down to the river. It was a gorgeous day. The sun was shining, the river was moving slowly, and I could see little fish darting beneath the surface. I could hear birds singing, and watched as a little white butterfly flitted by. But I didn't appreciate any of it. I didn't care. I was mad that everything could be so pretty and so *normal*, even though something this bad had happened to me.

"Skye, what's wrong?" Steve asked.

I didn't answer for a while. I couldn't find the words. I had no idea how to tell him. "I'm pregnant," I whispered.

"What?" he asked.

"I'm pregnant," I said, louder this time.

"Are you serious?" he asked.

"No, I'm lying," I said sarcastically. "Why would I tell you something like that if I wasn't serious?"

I couldn't take it anymore. I finally broke down. I sat there and cried for what seemed like forever. He held on to me and stroked my hair. I think

he knew it was better not to say anything, to just let me cry. When I finally got control of myself and looked up at him, I saw he had tears in his eyes, too.

"What do you want to do?" he said finally.

"I don't know! I said. "What can we do? I can't keep it, but I can't kill it either. I can't tell anyone, but there's no way I can keep it a secret. What are we going to do?"

I thought of all the time Steve and I had spent together. All the laughing, hugging, kissing, dancing... Then I pictured him on trial, in jail, the anger and disappointment in my parents' eyes. I started crying all over again.

Steve just held on to me like he did before. When I was finally okay again, I looked up at him. He looked directly into my eyes, right into the heart and soul of me.

"I love you, Skye," he said.

My bloodshot eyes got wide. I knew we loved each other, but it was the first time we said it. He wiped the tears off my face. "I love you, too," I said.

"Then run away with me."

"What?" I asked.

"Run away with me. We can save our money, and in a couple of months, fly somewhere else, where no one will ever find us. You can have the baby, we'll have a life of our own. We'll have to leave everyone we know, but it's worth it. Skye, you're all I need," he said.

I looked at him in disbelief. I hadn't even thought of that. But we could do it. I knew we could. I started to feel a lot better about the whole thing. It would be just Steve and me. No one to tell us what to do, no one to dictate our lives. We could be together without having to worry about the consequences.

"What about my friends?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "You couldn't tell them where we were going. Maybe after a couple months you could call them and let them know you were okay and stuff."

At least it was something. I was sure this was the only way. There

was nothing else for us to do. I would have to make some sacrifices, and hurt people I loved, but I didn't have any choice.

The next two months were hard. I put in extra hours at the restaurant where I worked. Steve worked a lot of overtime, too, and we saved all the money we could. We planned everything out. At first we thought about leaving the country, but I didn't want to. We'd have less of a chance of getting caught if we left the U.S., but I wasn't sure what the medical care in another country would be like, and that was important to me. I didn't want to do anything to endanger my baby. I had already decided that if it was a girl, I was going to name her Kylie, and if it was a boy, Kevin.

I also had a really hard time not telling my friends. I had always told Natalie and Katie everything. This was the first secret I'd ever kept from them. I felt so bad about it. And I knew I'd miss them so much when I was gone. I was so mad at myself for doing this to them, but I didn't know what else I could do.

The pregnancy was hard on me. I always threw up as soon as I woke up. I was tired all the time. I didn't have the energy that I used to. I didn't want to be pregnant. Not at all. I had always been happy with the way my body looked, and now I was going to get fat. I wasn't very happy with the prospect of gaining a lot of weight. I was also scared of having the baby. I wasn't a very big girl, and I knew that could cause some problems. I was afraid that something would go really wrong, and either the baby or I could die.

Since I was so small, I didn't gain a lot of weight at first, so it wasn't too hard to keep it from my parents. They were basically preoccupied with their own lives and their own problems, so they didn't even notice any change in me. I was beginning to wonder if they'd even notice when I was gone.

The weeks dragged on and on, until finally it was the night we planned to leave. I snuck out of my house at about midnight to meet Steve. We booked a red-eye flight; we figured we could be long gone before my parents ever even woke up. We bought the plane tickets under false names, so that way the police would have a harder time finding us. I was so scared. I

didn't want to leave, but I knew I had to. I thought maybe after I had my baby I could put it up for adoption, and then come home. I wasn't ready to live on my own. I had always wanted to, but now that it had actually come down to it, I knew I wasn't prepared. As much as I loved Steve and wanted to start my own life with him, it was hard not to think about everything and everyone I was leaving behind.

As we drove to the airport I sat and stared out the window, looking at the houses and trees and everything else familiar to me, not sure if I'd ever see any of it again.

Steve looked at me, and must have seen the expression on my face. "Are you scared?" he asked.

"A little. What about you?" I answered.

"I guess," he said, "but I'm just glad that we're together, and that we can finally get out of here and start our own lives."

That was easy for him to say. He should have been living on his own years ago. I was only sixteen. I still had some goof-off years left. I didn't want to raise a family, cook meals, clean a house, and do all of those things. I just wasn't ready. I wanted to go to college, I wanted to have a career. As I sat there, I watched all the dreams I had for my future slowly disappear. And because of that, I was scared.

It was a two-hour drive to the airport, and the whole time it was all I could do to keep from screaming. I didn't want to leave. I knew I would hurt everyone that loved me, and I felt so bad about it. I didn't want to hurt anyone. So I just kept telling myself that I had no choice, and it helped a little to soothe my conscience.

We finally got to the airport. The car we were driving was an old junker that Steve had fixed enough for it to get us to the airport. No one knew he had it, so that way it couldn't be traced back to us. He parked near the back of the parking lot, and we carried our suitcases into the building. We each only had one bag, because we had to pack quickly and didn't have time to grab much. We basically only brought the necessities. We'd saved almost four thousand dollars, and I had to carry all of it in my purse. I was really uncomfortable with it, so I made Steve hold on to it for the most part. I wanted to put the money in one of our suitcases, but he insisted we carry

it on us just in case our luggage got lost or stolen.

We boarded the plane almost as soon as we checked in. We showed up as late as possible, so not many people would see us, even though I doubt anyone would have noticed us anyway.

I sat down in my seat, and Steve sat next to me. He took my hand and squeezed. He looked into my eyes and kissed me softly on the lips. "I love you," he whispered.

I began to see everything in a new light. I still felt bad about leaving everyone I was close to, but now I was kind of happy to be leaving. I really was in love with Steve, and I wanted nothing more than to be with him. Forever. And that was what I was going to get. Once we were settled in somewhat, I thought maybe I would call one or two of my friends and try to explain. I would just have to hope that they would forgive me and understand. I was going to have to wait to contact my parents until I turned eighteen, because I knew they'd make me come home, and try to put Steve in jail. I couldn't let that happen.

"So where are we headed again?" I asked Steve.

"Ocean Point, South Carolina," he said.

"Oh, yeah." For some reason I could never remember the name of the town. I'd never been in South Carolina before. But we researched a bunch of small towns, and decided this one would be the best. It would be warm year round, like in California, and it looked like it'd be easy for us to find an apartment and jobs. After I had the baby, and we were financially stable, I planned to finish high school. All I had left was my senior year. But if I couldn't do that, I was at least going to get my GED. I had always looked down on people that dropped out of school, but now I could kind of understand why some people would.

I fell asleep soon after we took off. Steve woke me up a few hours later. "We're almost there," he said.

"Really?" I said groggily. I looked out the window, and sure enough, we were close to the ground. I could see green grass and marshes stretching out for miles and miles. It was really pretty.

We landed a few minutes later. Once the plane stopped, a male voice came over the intercom. *"Welcome to Charleston. The local time is nine*

thirty a.m., and the temperature is eighty-eight degrees. Thank you for flying American Airlines."

"Let's go," Steve said.

We got up, grabbed our bags, and got off the plane. There were few other people on the plane with us, so it didn't take long. It took forever to get our bags, though. They were the last ones to finally come out.

We took our bags and headed outside to catch a cab. It was only a fifteen-minute drive from Charleston to Ocean Point. Steve had already made reservations at a hotel for us for a few nights, so we would have time to find an apartment.

As soon as we were outside, the air hit me like a hot, wet blanket. I wasn't used to the humidity. After only two minutes outside, my hair was damp and sticking to the back of my neck. It was kind of nice, though. I could smell the subtle scent of the ocean in the air. It reminded me a little of home.

Steve waved down a cab. A heavysset black man got out and helped us put our bags in the trunk. We got in the back of the car, and Steve put his arm around me and pulled me close.

"The Mariott Hotel in Ocean Point," Steve said to the cabbie.

We rode most of the way in silence. I stared out the window some more. I always like to do that when I'm in a moving vehicle. I watched all the little buildings fly by. The foliage was a lot different from California. It was all really pretty. "I think I'm going to like it here," I said to Steve.

"Good," he said, smiling. He squeezed me, and kissed my hair. For the first time in my life, I felt truly content.

The next few days were actually kind of fun. We were on a mission: to find a place to live. We went through what seemed like hundreds of apartments before we finally settled on one. It was small, but cozy. It had one bedroom, one bathroom, and a larger room that was split into a kitchen and living room. Furniture came with it, and the rent was only \$250 a month. It was amazing that we found someplace so perfect, and so cheap.

Steve quickly found a job working in a garage working as a mechanic. The owner of the garage apparently made a lot of money, and luckily he really liked Steve. So within a few weeks, Steve was making close to twenty

dollars an hour. I found a job waitressing in a homey little restaurant that was within walking distance of our apartment. I wasn't making all that much money, and because I was too worn out from the pregnancy I couldn't work very much, but I figured that every little bit helped.

I started going to a doctor, to make sure everything was going okay with my baby. He was a big, friendly man, and very informative. I liked him so much that I asked for him to be the one to deliver my baby. It was still quite a ways off, but I wanted him to be there.

I had never really wanted to be a mother before, but I already couldn't wait until my baby was born. I knew I was kind of young to have a family and all that, but I wanted it. I'd never been so happy in all my life. I knew Steve was excited for the baby to come, too. He came with me to every doctor's appointment. He was there for me no matter what. Even when I had horrible mood swings and started screaming and crying and throwing things across the kitchen. He hid in the bedroom until I calmed down some, then he came back out, hugged me and made me lie down and take a nap. I couldn't believe how supportive he was. I thought all the time how lucky I was to have him.

Every once in a while I would get homesick. Usually I was okay, but sometimes I just couldn't hold back the tears. I missed my friends and family so much. I couldn't really make new friends where I was, because I was too busy all the time, and I guess I was kind of scared to get close to anyone again. So I just relied on Steve. He didn't seem to mind, though, because I think he was doing the same things.

I was a little bit surprised to find that we hadn't gotten caught yet. I never left a note or anything for my parents, so they could very well think that I was dead. That made me feel really bad, but I didn't know what else I could have done. I would think that they would realize that most of my clothes and things were gone, so maybe they would know that I left of my own will, and I wasn't kidnapped or something. I also hoped that they didn't blame themselves for me leaving. It wasn't their fault at all. I had dug myself a hole, and I did what I thought I should to make the best of it. And for the most part I was happy. Yes, I regretted having to leave all the people I loved, but all in all, it was worth it. I was finally where I thought I wanted

to be in my life.

A month or so passed fairly uneventfully. So far, we were doing well. We were making plenty of money, and had a place to live. I was about five months pregnant by then, and I wasn't feeling well most of the time.

Steve wasn't home very much, but that was okay. I wanted to be by myself most of the time anyway. I had to quit my job because it was just too much for me. It didn't really make a difference, though, because Steve was making more than enough to support us. I spent my time at home reading books about motherhood, and how to care for newborn babies. I knew almost nothing about caring for children, and I wanted to be the best mother I could. I was still only sixteen, far too young to become a mother, but I was really excited about having my baby. I knew Steve wanted it to be a boy, but I was secretly hoping for a girl. We decided to wait until it was born to find out which it was going to be. But either way, I still couldn't wait.

Lucky for me, Steve happened to be at home when I went into labor. He had decided to come home for lunch that day because he said that he missed me. I hadn't been feeling well all day, so I was glad to have him there. Suddenly I felt really sick to my stomach. I went in the bathroom and that's when I realized I was bleeding really badly. I knew something was very wrong.

"Steve, something's wrong," I said to him. "I'm bleeding, and it feels like I'm having contractions."

Without a word, he led me down to the car, and rushed me to the hospital. I knew I was getting blood all over the car, but I didn't care. It was the least of my worries at the time. I kept trying to figure out what could be wrong. I couldn't be going into labor, I was only five months along. I had no idea what was happening to me.

It only took about five minutes to get to the hospital, but it seemed to me like five hours. I was in so much pain. Steve carried me inside because I couldn't walk by myself.

I was taken immediately to a room, where I proceeded to give birth to a dead baby. I'd had a miscarriage. The doctor explained to me that I was just too young and too small for my body to be able to handle having a baby.

I had to spend the next few nights in the hospital because I didn't have the strength to go home. The doctors wanted to keep an eye on me to make sure nothing else went wrong. I don't really remember anything about being there. I was in such a state of shock and grief that I don't think I *wanted* to remember any of it. It was kind of like being in a dream. I slept most of the time, and when I was awake, faces of doctors and nurses, and occasionally Steve, just kind of floated by in a mist. Nothing mattered. Nothing at all. I felt like all my hopes and dreams had completely shattered. I had given up my life for this baby, and now that I didn't have the baby anymore, what was there to live for? I slept as much as I could so I didn't have to think.

The weeks after I left the hospital took me to the lowest point that I've had so far in my life. I was severely depressed. I didn't eat, I rarely slept. For the most part I didn't talk. I just lay in bed and cried on occasion. Steve would try to talk to me, but I would just stare at him. I don't think I even comprehended most of what he was saying. I couldn't think. I couldn't do anything.

Finally I came out of my confused state. I could hold conversations again, and I started eating some. I slept a lot, though. Now that I could actually think clearly, I wanted to avoid it as much as possible. I couldn't believe what happened. Since Steve was the only person that I was really in contact with, I took pretty much everything out on him. He tried so hard, but everything that came out of my mouth was a snappy, biting remark. I don't know how he put up with me. Maybe he realized how hard it was on me to lose the baby. Maybe he realized how much I'd given up for him and the baby. Maybe he blamed himself. I know that I blamed him.

That really wasn't fair, though. I made my own choices. He never pressured me to do anything. I wanted to have sex, I wanted to run away. All he did was suggest it. The only person to blame was myself, but I just couldn't handle that.

Eventually I was able to come to terms with what had happened. I was still depressed, but I was able to think of other things. Namely, my future. It was time for me to decide what I was going to do. I could either continue my life with Steve as well as I could, or I could try to finish my old

life. I thought about this a lot. But I kept it from Steve. I knew how much it would hurt him to know that I was thinking of leaving him. He was almost as hurt as I was at the loss of our child. So I knew that anything else would be too much for him.

After weeks of debating in my head, I had come to a conclusion. I couldn't stay here any longer. I knew I would hurt Steve if I left, but I also knew I would be hurting myself if I stayed. I wouldn't be able to finish my education, and I realized that I was no longer happy where I was. I missed my family, I missed my friends. I missed my home. I missed everything about California. So I finally decided to tell Steve. I broke the news one day after we finished eating dinner.

"Steve," I said. "I've been thinking a lot lately."

"About what?" he said.

Tears filled my eyes. "I want to go home."

He was silent for a few minutes, and tears started to slide down his cheeks. "I knew you would," he said. "And I don't want you to leave, but I can't make you stay."

"I know," I said. "Will you come with me?"

"Skye, as much as I want to," he said, "you know I can't do that. I have nothing left back there to go home to. Everything I have is here. And I realize that everything you have is back there ... in California. I love you, and I want you to be happy. I know you can't be happy here. Not after what happened. So as much as it's going to hurt me to lose you, I want you to go. I want you to be happy ... to live your life... You've still got so much to look forward to..."

Then he broke down completely. I stepped forward and put my arms around him as he cried. As we stood there, I began to realize how much he actually did love me. If I left him, he would be completely alone. He had based his entire life on me. But he truly wanted me to do what would make me happy.

So that's what I did. I still thought about staying, but I knew I couldn't. I had to go home. I had to face the consequences of the choices I'd made. I knew it would be hard, but it would be best in the long run. So

I decided to call Katie to let her know I was coming home. My mom should have been the first person I called, but I couldn't deal with her right now. She's probably so hurt. Katie started crying as soon as she realized who I was.

"We thought you were dead," she sobbed. "Everyone was so worried about you."

I explained to her what happened, and gave her the condensed version of the events that took place. I asked her to tell everyone that I would be home in a few days, but not to tell anyone why I left. I wanted people to hear it from me when I tried to explain myself. I knew I could trust her.

That was yesterday. My plane leaves tomorrow at nine a.m. I should be home at about ten a.m. California time. I must admit, I'm scared. I don't know what I'm going to do without Steve. I'll miss him so much. We've agreed that we're going to keep in touch. And maybe, when I turn eighteen, I'll come back to him. I guess we'll see. Whatever happens, happens. I'll deal with that when the time comes. Right now I've made another choice, and I'm going to have to follow through. I'm going home.

The End