

Finding Mike

Ethel's car was a run-of-the-mill American brand, larger than what I was used to driving. It got me home just fine. I hurried to the apartment door, fumbling with the key in the lock until it opened.

"Mike?" I called.

No answer.

I looked into the kitchen. "Mike?"

Not there.

I looked into the bedroom—maybe he had passed out on the bed. No luck. The apartment was empty.

Where could he be? Driving around the streets somewhere in a stupor? Maybe he stopped for a bite of food and got to talking. Yes, that could be it. After all, he was a "talker." Maybe I had misread his behavior that morning. I picked up the phone book and flipped the pages. Whom do I call? The police? They'd probably think I was a nut case; some unreasonable wife trying to control her husband's every move.

Dear God. What do I do? I prayed for an answer.

The phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hello. Helen?"

"Yes."

"This is Phyllis."

"Yes, Phyllis." I knew the name. She was the real estate lady that had helped us find this apartment to rent. What on earth could she want?

"Have you heard from your husband this morning?"

"No, and I'm worried."

"Well, I heard on the news that a little red car with Washington license plates was involved in an accident on El Camino."

My heart sank, my knees buckled. I grabbed hold of the table to steady myself.

"I immediately thought of you and Mike," Phyllis went on. "I hope everything is okay."

"Me, too. Thank you, Phyllis. I'll call the hospital."

I picked up the phone book and found the number for the hospital in Redwood City. No, he was not listed as an inpatient, nor in their emergency room. I asked if there was any other hospital in the area, and the receptionist referred me to Palo Alto Stanford. With trembling hands I dialed the number.

"Palo Alto-Stanford University Hospital," a woman's voice said. "How may I help you?"

"I'm trying to find my husband," I answered. "I think he may have been in an automobile accident and might be in your hospital." I gave her our names.

"One moment, please. I'll check."

I waited for what seemed like a lifetime. Please. Please, lady, come back. My hands grew more wet and cold with each minute that passed.

"Ma'm?"

"Yes."

"Did you say your name was Helen?"

"Yes. Is he there?"

"Yes, he is. Can you get here soon?"

"I'll do my best. Is he okay? Is he alive?" How was I to get there soon? I shouldn't drive Ethel's car any farther, and I knew I didn't have enough money for cab fare.

"I'm sorry ma'm, I can't give out that information. Please check in at the admitting desk as soon as you get here."

"Thank you." I hung up the phone. My frigid fingers trembled as I dialed the savings department number at work. Anxiety wreaked havoc in my gut. Hurry up, Ethel, answer, before I throw up.

She answered the phone.

"Hi, Ethel. It's me, Helen."

"What's happened? Did you find him? Is he okay?"

"I don't know. I found out he's in the hospital and I need to get there soon. They wouldn't tell me if he was alive or dead." I pushed back the urge to cry. "I didn't even think to ask directions how to get there."

"We'll see you get there. Don't worry. Hold on just a minute."

Her reassuring manner calmed my turning stomach a bit. My thoughts were all on Mike as the on-hold background music poured into my ear. Not one consideration about my job or if this interruption could get me fired entered my mind. The music stopped and Ethel was back.

"You stay right there. Tom will bring me over to get my car, and he'll drive you to the hospital."

"Okay, thanks." I hung up the phone, made a fast trip to the bathroom, then stood by the window and watched for them—my supervisor and Tom, one of the collection men on staff.

They showed up in less than ten minutes. Ethel gave me a hug, took her keys, and said she'd pray for Mike and me. Tom rushed me into his car and we headed for the hospital.

"Why are we going north?" I asked. Although I didn't know my way around the town yet, I did know my compass directions.

"To the hospital!"

"Palo Alto-Stanford Hospital is north of here?"

"Oh! Palo Alto? I thought he was in the Redwood City hospital." Tom made a couple of quick turns and headed south toward Palo Alto on El Camino Real.