

A MOTHER'S LIFE

By **Kim Drew Wright**

Doctor Annie Gordon was running late. She had a million things on her mind. Her daughter's wedding fast approaching, she needed this one afternoon to get things checked off her list. Call the florist. A fitting for her mother-of-the-bride dress. Appointment with the caterer. A dinner date with her husband to discuss finances. She'd had to reschedule surgery on a heart with carotid arteries. The poor bastard was going to die anyway, seventeen percent chance even with the surgery. What did he expect? His chart said he'd smoked for forty years. His blood tests practically reeked of alcohol. We had to live with the consequences of our choices. Die with them.

She turned left on Martin Luther King Drive and begged the next light to stay green. Annie hit it a hot yellow, changing to red above her Saab. Her glance darted to the rearview, no cops. Thank goodness. She had just enough time to slide in La Posh Boutique and try on her dress for final alterations, before her one o'clock caterer appointment. Neuman's was the hottest place in town. She'd waited six months to get this appointment. She could not miss it. The wedding was in five weeks. Annie could hardly believe it.

Her only daughter. Lisa was too young to be getting married. But, who was she to say she shouldn't do it? Lisa, her little tomboy, now picking out designer dresses and elaborate bouquets. Blackmun Tulips with sprigs of Bleeding Hearts. It didn't matter that it was the wrong season for tulips. Or, that in order to get them this time of year, they had to be shipped

directly from a florist in Holland. Or, that the extra fee, just for shipping in climate-controlled crates, was \$400. No guarantee they would arrive as planned, the day before the wedding. Too many time zones.

Time. She'd meant to call her first husband, Lisa's father, reach out and have a frank discussion, a heart-to-heart. But time had slipped away, with her frantic hospital schedule and then the wedding planning for the past year. Ever since he'd gotten remarried things had been strained. He lived on the west coast with his new family. She'd call and ask if he wanted her to book them a hotel for the wedding. Or just ask if he had it covered. Tread lightly.

Annie dug in her pocketbook with one hand for her phone. She'd better call Neuman's and tell them she may be a couple minutes late. She scrolled through her contact list. Had she put them under N for Neuman's or C for caterer? She looked up. The next light was yellow, she sped up. It changed to red, but she could still make it. A lawyer in a white Escalade, running late for court, gunned it through the intersection. Slammed into her driver's side door, spinning her small car around so she faced the direction she had come.

The airbag exploded at 186 miles per hour, broke her nose and fractured her jaw. Metal shrapnel embedded in her legs, already crushed by the chassis. Still fixable injuries. Glass from her window, fractured at impact, flew at lightening speed. A triangular shard pierced her side at a tragic angle, sliced through the delicate lining between ribs four and five, and punctured her heart.

There was only a moment. One moment before onlookers decided if they would act, watch, or drive away. A moment before men started opening car doors, yelling for others to stay back. Before trembling fingers tapped out only three numbers on phones. One moment before strong arms pulled at twisted door handles that wouldn't budge. Before ambulance

sirens sounded distantly, headed her way. Just a moment where the click, click, clicking of her turn signal, that must have switched on in the crash, was the only thing she heard over her heart beat, beat, beating. Flooding out its desire to do nothing more than what it had done for the past fifty-four years.

In that moment Annie did not worry about getting to the trendy caterer in time. She didn't fear a frost in a Holland tulip field or rain on one specific Saturday in her town. She wasn't concerned with the truthfulness of the saleslady at La Posh when she insisted Annie did not look paunchy in her coral dress, or, that, when she looked in their three-sided mirrors she saw her own mother of twenty years ago. She did not think of her second husband of ten years and whether he would be okay with an open bar at the wedding, anguish over if it was tacky to switch to a cash bar at midnight. Nor did she think of her first husband of fifteen years, and how he looked the first time he held their baby daughter. She wasn't concerned about missing that daughter's wedding day in five weeks or if she'd given her children enough advice to last the rest of their lives.

What she did worry about was this. Graduation day. An old boyfriend. A yearbook entry from 1978.

*Annie,
Graduation's finally here. I hope you can tear yourself away from UVA to come catch one of my games down at Wake. I know you'll make good grades and get in medical school like you always wanted. I'm glad there's no hard feelings. I've thought about it a lot, and I think we did the right thing. Like our parents said, we're both so young, our whole lives ahead of us. I'm sure you'll have that baby girl you want some day. Who knows, maybe it'll even be with me. Another chance?
Take care. Call me this summer.
Collin*

She wondered at her response of, *you'll always be in my heart*. Nervousness camping in

the pit of her stomach. A doctor's office. The emphatic crinkle of paper. Cold steel on bare feet. Stains on a ceiling. The sound of a strong heartbeat. Just a pinch.

Kim Drew Wright's fiction and poetry has appeared in many literary journals, including *The Pinch*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, and *The Milo Review*. She graduated from the University of North Carolina and had an advertising career. Kim is CEO at Quick Wit Lit and produces *Real Spiel*, a newsletter for witty readers and writers. Read more of her work on @kimdrewwright.wix.com/kimdrewwright.