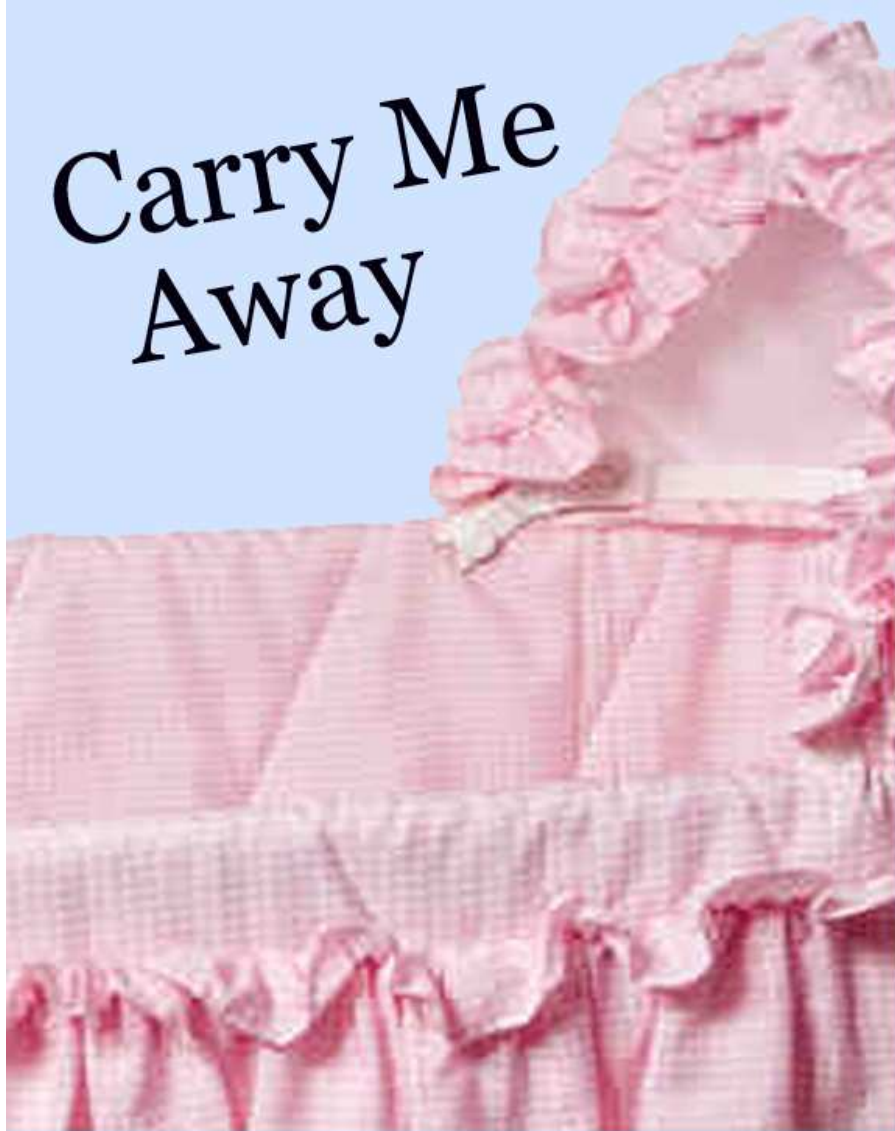


Carry Me Away



a short story
by **Tammy Bjornson**

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No matter what Mia did turning back the clock was impossible. Except for her husband Sam and little Henry everything else was up for grabs.

Wrap me up on a silver platter, she thought. Here you go God, I'm all yours. Just please, don't do this.

After three days of bargaining, reasoning--and finally begging--nothing changed. There was only one thing left to do. Watching the sun slip beneath the moon, Mia closed her eyes and whispered a prayer.

No one disturbed her, not even Henry. Almost every other night, his soft little footsteps would echo down the hall. Mia would flip the blankets back, tuck him in beside her without a word, then fall right back to sleep.

Tonight, the hallway was silent. Was Sam on the couch

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again? With Henry in his bed? Getting out of bed was out of the question, so she would never know.

There was no pain, just a stiffness in her lower stomach. Mia wasn't sure if this was part of having a miscarriage, or just the result of holding on to something that was slipping away. Deep down, the answer was there. No matter how much she was willing to give up, God was not going to save her little girl.

When morning came, Sam lifted Mia carefully off the bed and carried her to the bathroom.

"I'll be right out here." Sam pointed to the hallway behind him, then closed the door.

Looking down summoned all the courage she had left. Her lips trembled at the sight of blood on the tissue. "Why?"

Sam knocked lightly on the door, then peeked his head in.

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“Are you okay?”

Mia looked down at the floor, shaking her head. Inching up from the toilet seat, she squeezed her legs together.

Sam rushed in, tucking his hands under her elbows. With one hand, he reached down to tug her pajama bottoms up. They both sat down on the edge of the tub.

Wrapping one arm around her stomach, Mia’s eyes clenched shut. Rocking back and forth, she stomped one foot on the floor. “Why?” Shivering, she looked at him, tears running down her cheeks. “I wanna know. Tell me.”

Sam leaned over to look in the toilet. A shaky sigh escaped him, as he sat back down. “It’s worse. Mia, we need to go. Mia...” Kneeling down on the bath mat, he curled both arms around her waist.

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Henry was waiting in the hallway, behind the bathroom door. His eyes followed her small, jerky steps into the kitchen. Hunching over, he looked into her eyes. “Why are you walking like that, Mommy? Did you hurt your back?”

Sam crouched down in front of Henry. “No, Mommy’s not feeling very good. Just a sec, Henry.” Standing back up, he hurried over and lowered Mia into the nearest chair. Turning, he motioned for Henry to come over to him. “Nana’s coming over for a bit, while Dad takes Mommy to the doctor. Okay?”

Henry looked over at Mia, his eyebrows raised in worry. “Why are you not feeling good, Mom?”

“It’s just a bug, sweetie. Okay? You play with Nana, and I’ll be home before you even start to miss me.”

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A few hours later, Mia watched as Sam pull the comforter down on their bed and fluffed her pillow. Not bothering to change, she stood waiting. Sam smoothed the wrinkles out of the bed sheet, then took a step back so she could crawl in. Tucking the blankets, he leaned down and kissed her forehead.

“Are you okay?”

Mia lifted her chin to meet his gaze.

He lowered his eyes and sighed. “That was a stupid question, I’m sorry.”

Mia nodded. “Go, be with Henry. He needs you.”

“Okay. I’ll check on you in a little bit.”

“Whatever.”

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The door clicked shut, and the room fell into darkness. The shot of Demerol and Gravol swam through her body--numbing the skin, soothing her frazzled nerves, and hopefully--if God hadn't completely forgotten--protect her from the pain to come. The doctor in the E.R. said it would be better if the miscarriage completed on its own. By getting her to relax, it would happen without the need to remove the product of...

Baby, she thought crossly. Not product of conception. How dare he.

Mia could feel her body letting go. Like a stone thrown in a pond, she sunk into the mattress becoming completely cocooned.

Pain. The thought of it made her yank the blankets down, cracking her thin shell of protection. Fear slithered inside like a snake, wrapping itself around her heart.

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Scraping her tongue against the roof of her mouth would not get rid of the metallic stench of blood. After three days, it was so strong she pressed her nose against the blanket to block the smell.

Eyes closed, taking deep breaths, she could feel herself slipping again, this time taking her mind along for the ride. Somewhere between sleep and consciousness, someone was watching. At first, all she could picture was her soft curly brown hair. Then pretty blue eyes, just like Sam's.

The little girl, no more than five years old, in a white frilly dress, was sitting on the edge of their bed swinging both feet, a soft playful smile on her lips.

Mia stared for a long time before she spoke, and when she did, there was no sound. "I will never forget you." Tears welled

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up in her eyes as she mouthed the words. “Never.”

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At times, she thought it would have been better to gather them all up: her family, friends, co-workers, boss, even the people she didn't really like. Say it once. She lost the baby. There. Done.

Saying it over and over again was like stabbing herself repeatedly in the heart. After awhile, it was easier to say nothing and hope they didn't ask.

A week has gone by now and Sam was still following her: rubbing her back, caressing her hair, kissing her cheek. Sometimes he had the right words to say, and other times he just held her fiercely against him.

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“Sam?” Mia asked, wrapped tightly in his arms.

“Yes?”

She paused for a moment. “I want you to go get her.”

Sam took a step back, lifting her chin with his finger.

“Who?” He asked but his eyes gave him away.

“You know who.” She slapped his hand away. “I want her back. They took her.” Mia pushed him away. “I want them to give her back to me.”

“Mia...”

“No!”

Grabbing her arms, pulling her in, his voice grew thick. “I wanted that baby too. But I can’t, Mia. The baby is gone.”

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Standing at the kitchen window, Mia can see Sam and Henry walking out to the truck. Knocking on the window, she calls out to them. “Love you!”

Henry turned around first. “Love you too, Mommy!”

Smiling, she blows him a kiss. Henry jumps as high as he can go, grasping the air, and gobbles it up.

Sam laughs at Henry then looks up at her. Bringing his fingertips to his lips, he mouths the words...*I love you.*

Mia touches the window, smiling.

Being alone is not at all like it was a month ago. But there are still moments, like now, when she can see the shadow of sadness walking towards her.

As they drive away, the smile fades from her lips. Turning,

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she walks toward the hallway. The door to the middle bedroom is closed. It's always closed. Sam makes sure of that.

Behind the door is a tiny little room, barely big enough for Henry's old crib and dresser. Or the pile of pink and white blankets piled on the floor, still in the packages.

The door is closed. She doesn't have to go in if she doesn't want to. But something is pulling her; a soft tug on her heart. Can she hold it together? Maybe. Maybe not.

Sometimes Mia thinks about that cosmic place her little girl lives in. A little fragment of Heaven created just for the two of them. To be together, forever.

Is this little room the doorway to Heaven?

Hand resting on the doorknob, Mia stacks the bricks higher and higher around her heart as the broken part of her sits quietly

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inside watching the wall go up.

“If God knew how angry I was, you won’t be there. He knew how badly I wanted you. Even though I was scared, I still wanted you. My Little Leo.”

Sam didn’t understand that every time Mia pictured the baby, pink brushstrokes swirled across the canvas in her mind; pigtails wrapped in pink ribbon, walls decorated in Precious Pink paint, and lacy curtains with miniature bundles of pink flowers hand sewn into the fabric.

Squeezing her eyes tight, she turned the doorknob. Why was she doing this to herself? Another question she could never answer.

Pushing the door open, her little girl sits, waiting.

“What happened?” Mia asked. “Did you change your

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mind?” There’s no change in the little girl’s face, and Mia starts to plead with her. “It’s not too late, you know. Henry still thinks you’re inside of me.”

The little girl smiles.

“You could come back. Henry would love you. He wants to be a big brother so badly.”

The little girl fades away. “No.” Mia reaches her hand out. “Please, come back.”

A few minutes pass, and there’s no one in the room. Standing up, Mia walks out, pulling the door closed behind her.

Henry’s room is at the end of the hall. Her little boy with soft blonde hair and hazel eyes. Reaching a hand to her face, the soft caress of his little hand remains. She is still a mother.

Sitting on the edge of Henry’s bed, she can see the

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bedroom she shares with Sam. The man who loves her more than life itself. The only man who can shake apart the brick wall around her heart, then helplessly watch her stack the bricks up again, one by one.

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Rocking back and forth in the living room, Mia runs her fingers across Henry's forehead, just the way he likes it.

“Mommy?”

“Yes.”

“Is there still a baby in your tummy?”

Mia stops rocking. Over and over, she thought about what she would say to him. But there was nothing to say, except the

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truth. “No.”

“Why?” He lifted her shirt to look at her tummy.

Mia pushed her shirt back down, and grabbed his hand.

“The baby got sick. She couldn’t grow anymore, so the angels took her to Heaven.”

“Where Papa Gil is?” Henry asked.

“Yes. She went to be with him. Papa is going to take care of her now.”

Henry laid his head against her, his hand on her tummy. “I wanted to play with her.”

Mia started to rock the chair again. “I know. Me too.”

“I seen her, Mommy. She visited me while I slept.”

“Yeah? What did she look like?”

“She had lots of hair, and we had the same laugh!”

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Mia laughed. “Really? Wow! That’s pretty cool.” She gave him a little squeeze. “I love you, you know that?”

“I love you too. And you’re cute too.”

“I am?” she asked, laughing. “You must be listening to Daddy. But, hey, it’s nice to know I can still be cute.”

“Mom?”

“Yes, bub?”

“Can I watch cartoons?”

“No, it’s bedtime.”

“Awwwww...”

“Uh,uh. You need your sleep.” She hugged him. “So, am I still cute?”

Henry climbed down off her lap, and crossed his arms across his chest. Mia copied him.

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He glowered at her, trying not to smile. “Yeah, I guess so.”

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Snow is melting from the rooftop now, trickling into the gutters. Mia stares out the dining room window, watching the silky blades of newborn grass push their way up to meet the morning sun.

“What are you thinking about?”

Mia turns to find Sam standing at the entrance of the kitchen. “Nothing. I’m...”

Sam sticks his hand up. “Don’t do that. I’ve been watching you. You look so sad. Don’t tell me it’s nothing.”

“What do you want? You want to hear that I still think about it sometimes? No, you don’t. You want me to be over it.”

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Sam takes a step toward her. “That’s not true.”

Mia glares at him.

“Yes, okay, I do. When you’re ready. All I want is for you to be happy.” He shrugs his shoulders. “That’s it. I don’t want to see you hurt, it tears me up to see you like that.” He brings his hands up, curling them into fists. “Cause I can’t stop it. I can’t do a damn thing about it. Except watch.”

Mia walked up to him, wrapping her arms around his waist. “Shhhhh...” Leaning back, she looks into his eyes. “I’m okay, a little sad yes, but otherwise okay. Some days, it’s a little harder to accept that it actually happened. Other days, I feel guilty because I forgot.”

“It’s okay to not think about it every second, Mia. It doesn’t make you a bad person.”

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“No, it just makes me human. I know that.”

“Do you want to try again?”

Mia lets go of him. “What?”

“You heard me. Do you?”

“It’s not up to me.”

Mia pushes him away from her. “I can’t stand that not up to me garbage! Why me?”

“Because you’re the one that will hurt the most if it doesn’t work, that’s why.” Sighing, he plunked down in one of the dining room chairs. “I’m okay with us, Mia. The way it is right now. I am. There, I said it.”

“You don’t want another baby?”

“I did, but I’m not sure anymore.”

“We tried for so long.”

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“Three years.”

“And we went to all those doctors.”

“Who all had different opinions on what we should do.

Mia, it’s not up to them.”

“No, apparently it’s all up to me.”

“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“If you didn’t want this,” she banged her fist on the counter, “why did I take all those damn fertility drugs?”

“I wasn’t ready to give up then. But it feels different now. I don’t feel the same.” Sam pointed to his heart. “You and Henry, I feel that.”

Mia turned her back away from him, and braced the kitchen counter. “So it’s really over.” A shaky sigh escaped her as she felt Sam’s body press up against her.

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“I don’t know for sure if it’s over. All I’m saying is, I’m okay with it just being the three of us.” He leaned in, putting his chin down on her shoulder. “Maybe in time, you’ll feel the same way.”

Mia laughed but didn’t smile. “Time is not my friend. It doesn’t stop and wait for you to finish hurting. It just rushes by you, leaving you behind to rot.” She was silent for a moment. “Why couldn’t it carry me away, like it did everything else? My friends moved on, parents moved on. Even you.” Mia turned, her eyes meeting his. “Time healed your pain Sam, but it didn’t heal mine.”

“Okay.” Sam brushed the hair from her eyes. “When you’re ready. Either way, I’ll be there with you. For the record, I never left. Nothing could carry me away from you. I’ve

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always been here, waiting.”

Mia looked up. “For what?” she asked.

“For you to say goodbye to her.”

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Mia stood in the grass, watching the leaves float wistfully to the ground. Henry was standing at the fence, hopping up and down with excitement.

“Ready. Set.” Mia threw her arm down. “Go, Henry, go!”

His little legs shot out, running as fast as they could go. Sticking his arms out, Superman style, Henry dives into the pile of leaves.

“Oh, yeah. That was ten points right there, little man.”

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“Really Mom?” Henry poked his head out from under the leaves. “You think so?”

“You betcha.”

Reaching down, Mia helped him up, dusting the crumbled leaves from his pant legs.

“You’re smiling, Mom.”

Mia stopped dusting. “Yes.”

“Because you’re happy?”

“Must be. What do you think?”

Henry nodded. “I like you smiling, Mom.” Reaching for her hand, they walked together back to the house. “Mom?”

“Yes, Henry.”

“I love you.” He pressed her hand against his face.

“I love you, too. You’re a good boy for Mom.”

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A soft breeze fanned her face, tickling her hair. “You go on in, honey. I need to bag these leaves before the wind really kicks them up. I’ll come inside in a minute, okay?”

“Okay, Mom.”

Mia went back, grabbing the rake laying on the ground, and started gathering up the leaves. As she stuffed the last of the leaves into the bag, one of the seats on Henry’s swing set started to creak.

Mia watched intently as a shimmering light grew. At first, it was just an outline. Then the little girl was there, swinging back and forth, her frilly white dress swaying in the breeze.

Mia didn’t move. “I’ve missed you.”

The little girl giggled, swinging higher and higher.

“I thought, maybe, you were never coming back. And I

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wasn't ready for that."

The little girl looked over, her white strapped sandals skidding in the pebbles. As she hopped off the swing, Mia could feel the broken part of her picking away at the brick wall, wanting to come out. "I need to say goodbye."

The little girl stood still, watching her.

"But I don't know if I can." Mia took a step toward her, waiting for her to disappear. But she didn't. Mia walked up to her and knelt down in the grass. "I will never forget you."

The little girl brought her hand up and blew her a kiss. Mia could feel a soft breeze against her cheek, and smiled back.

Eyes sparkling, the little girl brought her arms up like a butterfly and started to twirl. Mia watched as she slowly faded away for the last time. "A part of me will always be with you."

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She touched her lips with her cupped hand and blew her a kiss.

“Goodbye.”

That kiss floated away, following her daughter to that cosmic place she no longer wished for. Carrying the broken part of her. Carrying her away.