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The Other Side of the Door

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Abstract:

Denise and her husband Dave arrive at the Medical Centre for a prenatal appointment. Denise is 20 weeks pregnant with her second pregnancy, and she's worried about the ultrasound results. The waiting room, examination room, and even her doctor all run on deep learning. Before Denise and Dave go into their ultrasound, they hear a mysterious voice knocking on the waitroom door, trying to get in. Denise tries to help, but the door is locked. She is left wondering why some women do not have access to prenatal care, despite the LifeChip in their hand that gives them access. Denise and Dave go into the exam room and Denise steps into the ultrasound. Within 60 seconds she is given the results from Dr. Wise and finds out her baby has a chromosome error and her pregnancy must be ended. Denise and Dave tell their doctor they want to keep their baby, and then try to leave the room. The door is locked and they cannot leave until Denise takes the pill, which is a progesterone blocker that will terminate her pregnancy. The only way to leave is by taking the pill, so Denise pretends to. Once outside the building, Dave and Denise begin to argue. The Medical System will find out soon that she still has the baby. Where will she go to have her baby? Denise walks off and into the woods. Maybe the woman on the other side of the door can help her?

The Other Side of the Door
Sabrina Hope

We sit together on the hard chairs in one of the waiting rooms of the Medical Centre. Everyone is on their phones.

Knock knock knock.

Someone was banging on the other side of the waiting room door. That's odd. That's never happened before. I've been here before for my earlier prenatal screening and for my previous pregnancy.

Then I hear a small voice.

"Hello, can someone help me? Can you open this door?"

No one moves. A few of us look up, but then we return to our phones a few moments later.

"Is anyone in there? I need to see the doctor, but I can't get in" the muffled voice comes again.

I reach out and touch Dave's hand who sits quietly beside me. I look at his face and search his dark brown eyes.

I glance up at the security cameras in the corner.

I wait.

Knock knock knock.

She could be young. She could be my daughter. She is someone's daughter.

I get up and speak close to the door, "Try using your phone, if it's not picking up your LifeChip."

"Can you just open it?"

"Maybe try the Prenatal App on your phone. It should automatically open for you."

"I don't have it. Please, open the door"

I'm confused. She must have a LifeChip because it's inserted immediately after birth. And the Prenatal App opens automatically and books appointments as soon as you get a positive result on the SmartPregnacy Test. Maybe this was a hoax? But she says she needs the doctor.

I put my hand on the door handle and pull. It's locked.

"I can't open it," I say into the door. "It's locked. I'm so sorry."

I feel embarrassed. Did everyone else know the door is locked?

"It's okay. Thanks," the small voice says.

I wait a moment and then return to my seat by Dave.

"What was that about? Dave asks me without looking up from his phone.

"Maybe there's been a mistake?" a woman chimes in before I can answer.

"These places are not immune to mistakes and fuck-ups," she continues. "They probably have her coded as a man, or she's 14, so too young to have a baby by their standards."

My mind expands with ideas of who she is. How is she not accessing prenatal care like the rest of us? It's supposed more efficient with the LifeChip.

I finally find my voice to respond: "That's so true! They are probably trying to keep her out on purpose."

"Or she's undocumented and doesn't have healthcare, so it's fraud if you let her in. In which case, the door is doing its job." Dave says in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Or she’s not even pregnant and has the wrong door,” says another man in the room with a chuckle.

The conversation ends, so we return to our phones and wait for the notification to pop up that we can proceed to the examination room.

Suddenly, both of our phones vibrate and we walk over to the door and scan our hands. Another door at the end of the hallway flashes green to show us where to go.

Dave and I sit in the two chairs in front of the wall-mounted screen. Dr. Wise is already waiting for us on the screen. Big smile, white lab coat, and thinning grey hair.

“How are you feeling today, Denise?” Dr. Wise asks in his friendly tone.

“I’m feeling much better.” I know he’s not a human like me, but he looks so real on the screen.

“Let’s get your blood pressure and then your ultrasound. When you’re ready, please pull up your sleeve and put your arm in to the band to your right.”

I obey. I want to please my doctor and Dave and not cause any issues. I’m worried though about the ultrasound.

Dr. Wise tells me my blood pressure is normal.

He then instructs me over to ultrasound machine. I have to remove my shirt and pull down my pants below my small belly, and then walk towards the wall of the machine.

“It only takes 60 seconds Denise, and then we will have the images,” Dr. Wise reassures me. But I am worried. What about something is wrong with my baby like last time?

The ultrasound beeps when it is done, and I step out and pull my shirt back on, and then go sit beside Dave.

“Unfortunately, Denise, your anatomy from today paired with your prenatal screening 5 weeks ago shows that your baby has a high chance of trisomy 21. I’m so sorry”

I don’t speak. I look down. I feel my heart racing and pounding hard in my chest. I don’t want Dr. Wise to talk anymore.

“The medical community recommends termination of the pregnancy as soon as possible. I know this is not the news you were hoping to hear today.”

Silence.

I find my voice and speak, but it’s small and sounds far away. “I don’t want to terminate. I want to keep my baby.”

Six months ago to the day, Dave and I found out our first baby, Oliver, had a genetic disease affecting his lung growth, and I had to terminate my pregnancy at 20 weeks. I felt a strong desire to protect my baby.

“I know this is tough, but you need to think about the quality of life for your child. What kind of life are you giving your baby?” Dr. Wise asks us.

I shuffle in my seat. I want to leave now. I stand up and speak directly to the screen.

“Thank you, Dr. Wise. We know mistakes happen, even with deep learning, so we will keep our baby and see what happens.” I walk to the door, and Dave follows behind me. I place my hand on the handle and turn. It’s locked. I try again, but it doesn’t open.

I turn quickly to Dave. I feel panic filling my lungs. We both realize at that moment that we are locked in and we must proceed with Dr. Wise’s orders.

I feel trapped in a game and I just want to leave. I see the security cameras in the corners of the room.

Dave walks back to the screen and speaks, friendly but firm. “The door is locked. Open the door please, Dr. Wise.”

“I’m sorry, Dave. I’m afraid I can’t do that. You must do what is right for your child and society. How will you care for a child who needs extra support?”

For my last pregnancy, I took the termination pill like I was told and we left. It seemed like the only way we could leave this time too.

I stepped close to the screen, “You’re right Dr. Wise. I will do what is right.”

“You’re doing the right thing, Denise. Please come to the counter and take your medication.”

I do as he says. A moment later, the pill comes out of the dispensary and rolls down. Then a mini bottle of water rolls down. I pick up the pill and play with it in my fingers and scratch it under my nails. What about I pretend to swallow it, or swallow it now and then vomit it out later? Still holding the pill, I take the bottle and untwist the small white lid. I mime putting the pill in my mouth and swallowing it, but I really hold it in my palm. I drink all my water, and then place the pill stealthily into the lid before screwing the bottom on it. Carefully, I put the bottle down the recycling shoot.

I walk back to my chair, not sure if Dave and Dr. Wise have bought my act. I sit down and look to the screen for instruction. Can they detect lying?

It works. Dr. Wise buys my act. He explains to me how the pill will block my progesterone causing my body to purge the fetus. He calls my uterus lining a “product”. I nod and listen to his

instructions. He refers me to a psychotherapist, Dr. Bewell, who I will have counselling with on my phone at 8 pm that night, and then weekly sessions for two months. He also refers Dave for counselling to Dr. Bewell too.

“See you in two weeks for your check-up. Take care” Dr. Wise smiles and waves, and then the screen slowly fades out.

I hear the door unlock as we get up to leave. We go through the door and then walk down the hall. We don’t talk. We wave our hands at the exit door and come out into another hallway in the large Medical Centre.

We wait for the elevator. I look at my LifeChip under my skin and scratch at it with one fingernail. How much information did it know about me? How soon would they know I was still pregnant? We knew very little of how our LifeChip worked. We were told it made life easier and more comfortable for us.

Finally, we exit the building. The air is cold and cuts into our faces.

Dave stops walking and turns to me suddenly, “Why’d you do that? I thought we were going to talk about it first?”

I don’t respond to him. I’m too scared to speak because they might hear us. I reach into my pocket and take out my phone and pull off the back cover and remove the battery.

“What are you doing, Denise? Dave asks me.

I answer by putting my fingers to my lips and mouth the “shhhh” sound. He seems to catch my drift. I take his phone from his hands and remove the battery from it too, and hand him back the pieces.

I then point to the sensors of the downtown SmartCity, and then gesture out to a wooded area not too far away. We walk a few minutes in silence. Our shoes crunching into the ice-covered snow. I heard from someone once that the sensors had trouble getting through heavily wooded areas. I hoped it was true.

I turned to Dave. “I didn’t take the pill. I pretended to take it. I didn’t want to experience the pain again. I didn’t want to lose our baby again. I don’t trust them.” I sigh heavily and then look down.

“Denise... What are we going to do?” Dave sighs.

“I’m going to have this baby”

“But it has problems. How can we keep it?”

“How do we know it has problems?”

“Because the ultrasound and testing.”

“Sometimes the system is wrong. You heard the women in the reception area.”

“You’re listening to a woman you don’t even know? The test results prove it. Just accept it. I can’t believe this is happening. You didn’t take the pill!

“It seems strange this has happened to us before. Maybe we are not allowed to have babies. Maybe they don’t want us procreating. Did you ever think about that? It seems strange that certain people can have babies and other people cannot. I don’t trust them”

“What are you going to do? Where are you having this baby? You’re not part of the medical system anymore. They think you’ve terminated, and they will find out the truth in 12 days”

I realize I can’t convince him. I can’t tell if he’s on my side or not, or if he’s just working things out. I turn and start walking away. I go further into the trees.

“Denise, where are you going? The car is this way.” Dave calls.

I stop and turn reluctantly to Dave. I watch my breath rise in the cold air. I raise my voice so Dave can hear me. He seems so far away now.

“I don’t know Dave. I’m guess I will find that woman on the other side of the door.” I turn away from Dave and walk. I’m not stopping again. If he wants to talk to me again, then he has to walk with me.