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## Burying Jeremiah

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## Burying Jeremiah

### *Adelphos Mikroteros*

“I never get to see you anymore,” Lydia let out in a frustrated groan.

“Are you kidding?” Jeremiah asked. “You’re literally seeing me right now. You see me for almost the whole time I’m here.”

“But you’re hardly ever here!” Lydia responded.

“It’s not my fault that work has me traveling so much. You know that I would stay here more if I could.”

Lydia put her head down like a child who was just scolded and responded softly as she grabbed her necklace moving the cross back and forth, “You’re right, there’s nothing you can do about it.” At this she turned and walked toward the living room, and sat down on the couch facing away from him.

Jeremiah knew better than to think that she believed those words, he gathered his thoughts as quickly as he could. “Come on. You don’t actually expect me to quit my job. Do you?”

“If it meant that you were here more,” she replied before the words fell out of his mouth with her frustration rising once more.

“Then what? A teacher’s salary is not going to pay the mortgage.” Jeremiah looked down at Lydia as she faced away from him. Her short brown hair was just enough to block him from seeing the tears coming out of her kind brown eyes, but he didn’t need to see those tears to know that they were there. His hard demeanor broke as he came closer to her. “Lydia,” he started as he took her small cold hands and enveloped them in his own. “If I quit my job that means we leave behind this beautiful house; we go back to eating out just one night a month; and it means that pretty necklace around your pretty little neck is the last one you’re going to see for a long time.”

Lydia turned to him and looked through the flood of her eyes into his now calm blue eyes. “That’s okay. How many times do I have to tell you that stuff doesn’t matter to me?” This time her response carried much less frustration. There was hope

in her voice; she was comforted by his suddenly calm demeanor. It sounded like she believed that after the countless number of conversations they had about Jeremiah quitting his job over the past year this one would change his mind. She began to reach for his shaggy brown hair to run her fingers through it like she had a hundred times before.

Jeremiah slowly put his hands over his face. He remembered that there was a time in which his wife seemed to be reasonable. He thought of her as the most practical woman he had ever met, but since he was promoted a year ago, she hasn't stopped nagging him about his job. What is logical about cutting off the family's main source of income? At first Jeremiah didn't like it any more than she did. He hated the airplanes and the lonely hotel rooms. He hated that half of his co-workers threw their morals out the window when their wives weren't around. Above all, he hated being away from his beautiful wife, and the preparations that she was making for their child. The difference between him and Lydia is that Jeremiah adjusted. He adapted to the fact that he could only sleep with his wife half of the time, and unlike many of his co-workers, he never looked for another woman to warm the bed the other half of the time. He learned to ignore his co-workers chiding him about his faithfulness to his wife. He even came to love the work that he was doing even more. After all he was the Vice President of Health and Safety for a quarter of the chemical plants in the United States. He was doing important work, not to mention the fact that he supported Lydia, and he was planning to support their baby boy.

Then the miscarriage happened. Only four months ago, they lost their child before either of them got to hold him. His name was going to be Hosea. It broke their hearts. At times Jeremiah would walk up the stairs only to find his wife crying in the old nursery. That was too much for him. He was supposed to be the provider and protector of his family and there was nothing he could do about this, so he worked. He provided because he failed to protect.

"Jeremiah," Lydia said, gently running her fingers through his hair. "I'm serious. I would rather live with you on a budget than without you."

"But you don't have to do either!" Jeremiah exploded. "You have me, and we aren't living on a ridiculous budget anymore! I've worked hard to get here, and I've done it for you and for..." He trailed off, and his tone became gentle once again, "We are going to have a child. I want to be ready when that happens."

"And we will be," Lydia insisted, "but we can still be ready if you quit your job."

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” Jeremiah answered under his breath as he stood up and walked away. He could not believe how selfish she was being. She would throw away all of the preparations for the arrival of their child that they had worked so hard for just to spend more time with him. The time they spent together didn’t even seem to be worth anything anymore. Every minute that they spent together seemed to be spent crying or fighting. As he turned to leave the room, he heard a whimper coming from the couch. He froze. It broke his heart to hear his wife cry, but he refused to be swayed by an emotional eruption. He put his hand on his face again as if he was trying to wipe the sympathy from it. With a deep sigh he took another step and made his way toward the bedroom.

Before the night was over Jeremiah would have to confront his wife again, but he simply needed some time to be alone. He needed some time to think. He sat down on the bed with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. The bedroom always proved to be a good place to think. The dark blue walls had a calming influence on him. He looked up at the cherry wardrobe that he bought just a month after his promotion. He was taken aback by how well it fit this room. It was so practical. Jeremiah needed a place to hang his dress clothes, because the closet was mostly full of his wife’s clothes, with the rest of the space being taken up by an unassembled crib, and a diaper changing table. Not only could he hang all his dress clothes, but in the drawers underneath them he could keep his jeans, t-shirts, sweat pants, underwear, socks, and athletic shorts. What couldn’t this wardrobe hold? It was perfect, but it cost \$900. It was because of his job that he could afford it. It was because of his job that he could afford everything in their house. He couldn’t imagine his life without all of those things. Could Lydia really imagine hers without them? Of course she couldn’t! It was a struggle for Lydia when they were paying off both of their student loans. She always used to complain about cooking dinner, but now she hardly ever does, because they go out almost every night that Jeremiah is home.

Jeremiah stood up and walked towards the wardrobe admiring its craftsmanship. He opened it up rubbing his hand along the wood. It was so smooth yet so sturdy. He had put some things that most would consider junk on the top drawer of the dresser, but to him they were once the most valuable things he owned. As he scanned the top shelf, there was something just beyond the light that had poured into the wardrobe when he opened the door. He reached to the back and grabbed a shell. When he recognized it, it grew heavy in his hand. So heavy that he could not bear the weight; the shell dragged him to his knees.

It transported him back to the day that Lydia brought this shell to him when he was sick on their honeymoon. He couldn’t leave the room that day, because despite what Lydia told him, he decided to drink the tap water.

It transported him back to the day that Lydia brought this shell to him when he was sick on their honeymoon. He couldn't leave the room that day, because despite what Lydia told him, he decided to drink the tap water. Even though he was incapacitated, he insisted that Lydia go have fun without him. She wasn't gone for an hour before she came back saying that if she couldn't take him to the beach, she would bring the beach to him. It was the whitest shell that he had ever seen. It was unaffected by any tint of the sand, and even now it was still untouched by age. It was as white as Lydia's wedding dress except for the three blue drops of water shaped like tear drops that were painted on it by one of the locals.

As Jeremiah knelt on the floor bent over the shell tear drops began to stream out of his eyes. He remembered how gentle she was with him when he was the weaker half. Not only did she stay back and spend the entire day with him, but she reminded him of his worth. She probably wanted to tell him, "I told you so," when Jeremiah got sick by doing exactly what she said not to do. She probably wanted to go to the beach and get a tan. She probably wanted to go to that fancy restaurant where they had a reservation. Instead, she stayed with Jeremiah and talked about whatever kept his mind off the convulsions that seized his stomach.

Now his diaphragm convulsed as he gasped for breath between his silent sobs. Jeremiah's eyes were opened. He realized that he was the selfish one. He realized that his vocation is not to be somewhere else trying to save the world, but it is side-by-side with his wife trying to save his marriage. Jeremiah realized that for the past year he has been playing the role of the selfless provider who went to work every day, but he was really the selfish outsider who tried to run away. He traveled, because it was better than facing the reality of a miscarried child and a wife that cried all the time.

Amid his silent sobs, thoughts of quitting his job tied his stomach in a knot. Now he realized that his job wasn't just about the income for his family — it was consistent. He was consistent there. No matter what happened, if there was a chemical spill or an employee injury Jeremiah was a calm, level-headed leader. Everyone he worked with knew that, and they counted on him for it. He would be letting them down. As reality began to set in, and the pain moved from his heart to his stomach, his sobs subsided. He grabbed his head firmly with one hand as if he could squeeze a decision out of it. He was going to let someone down. Would it be his wife or his work?

As much as Jeremiah wanted to sit there for the rest of night to deliberate, he knew that he had to go back and face his wife, who probably assumed that he was

going to come down and apologize to her and promise that it would get better soon like he had every time before. What he meant by that he didn't know. The baby wasn't coming back. If he got promoted to President of Health and Safety he would probably travel just as much. What about Lydia? How would she feel after a little while longer? Would she feel better after her "irrational emotions" faded or would she persist as she had for the past four months?

Jeremiah wiped some drying tears from his face as he slowly rose to stand. He turned to the wardrobe and closed the door; leaning towards it until his head touched the beautiful cherry. Then he looked down at the shell in his one hand as he stroked the door of the wardrobe with his other. He paused for a long moment, then pushed away from the wardrobe and buried the shell in his pocket.

"God, help me," he muttered to himself. After hesitating one last time, he left the room to meet his wife.