

## Seven

Kevin spent most of his early afternoon on the couch until he couldn't sit any longer. He found himself needing to do something other than sit, but he couldn't overcome Bill's warning about doing anything extraneous that would cause swelling. He was mentally exploring his options while in the back of his mind there was a nagging feeling that Bill's warning was a hoax he'd put together for the girls benefit. Ultimately, he decided that he'd rather not risk it and settled on taking a long hot shower instead.

He began making his way off the couch with the stealth of a hundred-year-old man and carefully limped his way up the stairs, taking one stair at a time. He knew he was overkilling with the caution, but the risk of swelling mortified him. Finally at the top of the stairs he turned and looked down at his accomplishment feeling triumphant then causally glanced down at himself just to confirm everything was still "normal". It took him another full minute to limp a couple of feet into the bedroom where he began to undress.

Everything was going fine until he got down to the prescribed jockstrap and underwear and he froze. Was he allowed to get that area wet? The dream of a long relaxing shower was being dashed and replaced with the possibility of a

European style bath. He looked at the wash cloth with disappointment and decided that he had no choice but to call Bill for instructions—he really wanted a long hot shower.

He dialed Bills office hoping to get Veloria on the phone instead of Bill, but he had no such luck. Bills gruffy voice came on the line with a “Hello.”

Bill never bothered to answer the phone with any professionalism. When asked why not, he always declared “I am a doctor, not a receptionist.”

“Hey Bill.” Kevin hesitated wondering whether he was being a bit ridiculous with his question. “I’d like to take a shower, but I’m not sure what to do about the jock strap and underwear. Can I get that area wet?”

Bill tried not to poke fun at his friend, but lost to a giggle before quickly recovering, “I’m sorry. That was very unprofessional of me.”

“Yeah, it was.” Kevin said feeling a warmth creep over him.

Kevin wasn’t aware of Bill’s conversation with Modra that morning. She had called to give him an update on Kevin and in the process happened to mention that he was being dramatically over cautious.

“I’m sorry.” Bill said still smirking. “Here, let me start over.” He paused and focused.

“Ok.” Kevin replied, already regretting the phone call.

“Alright now, Kevin, what is it you are concerned would happen if you showered?”

Kevin caught the condescension in his tone and said, “No Bill, I’m not worried that it will fall off.” He rolled his eyes at having put himself in that situation, but he was already too far down the rabbit hole to turn back. At that point he decided he may as well follow through and find out whether or not he could have that glorious shower. “I’m just not sure if I’m supposed to get it wet or not is all.”

“Oh, well then.... yes...I don’t see why not. You are ok to take a shower.”

“Thank you.” Kevin said, wanting to get off the phone so he could start his shower.

“Anytime.” Bill said. The grin on his face was obvious in his tone. “I hope I was able to answer your question to your satisfaction. Please feel free to call me again with any further questions.”

Kevin hung up the phone, mumbling some profanity. He should have had Modra ask before she left; Bill would have never laughed at her. *That’s all right*, he consoled himself, *I’ll get him back next week on the golf course.*

He was feeling clean and was back on the couch reading his book when he saw something move in his peripheral vision. He glanced up and was happy to see that it was Veloria standing on the other side of the glass door.

Veloria arrived at about 5:15 p.m., she was over two hours late according to the time he had been told to expect her. With a mild exaggeration he raised an eyebrow and tapped his watch as

if to say tsk-tsk for her being late and then waved her in, but she didn't smile back or come in. In fact, she looked as if she were getting ready to sprint away. She was on the other side of the door looking at him with her big, sad, blue eyes contemplating her approach when Kevin realized that Diego hadn't arrived with her. He immediately wondered if that wasn't the reason for her sullen eyes.

Veloria had been ready to run back into her car until she realized Kevin had noticed her arrival. She suddenly resented the great big glass door that she had always loved to stand behind when admiring the canyon views across the way. Gathering herself and her courage, she reminded herself that she really had no choice but to come to Kevin, she needed his help—their help. She needed to talk to someone she could trust to be calm and give her solid advice when she told them she was pregnant. She had wanted to tell Modra first and ask her for help, but she couldn't bare the disappointment in her eyes, telling her would be the same as telling her mother and father and she wasn't ready for that yet. Right now all she wanted was help with preparing herself on how to tell her parents. She held her breath, opened the door, and slowly exhaled when she was on the other inside.

Veloria entered without saying a word or giving a smile—she was nervous. She wore blue jeans and a soft warm sweater with a picture of the dwarf, Grumpy. Her sweater had big

writing across the top that read *Happy to be Grumpy*, which made Kevin smile.

“Hey, Grumpy, that’s a cute sweater.”

She looked confused and had to look down to realize what he was referring to. “Oh . . . thanks . . . it’s old.” She said, realizing she was already on the verge of tears. She swallowed them back and took another deep breath to push the lump in her throat down.

“Hey, where’s this Diego guy?” Kevin said cheerfully, “Is he in the car? Do I get to meet this mystery man?” Kevin was looking out the front door as he spoke in case he was straggling behind. “He can come in you know, I’m not going to beat him . . . well, except at cards,” Kevin said gaily. “I have a freshly shuffled deck from Harrah’s Casino, two very sharp pencils, and a score pad. As Nancy Grace likes to say, “I’m locked and loaded.” Kevin wouldn’t admit it out loud, but he had become so bored that had been looking forward to hanging out with Veloria and Diego and playing a game of cards together. He really wanted to do something other than read his book or watch another re-run of the Bourne Identity or another dreadful chick flick on TV.

Veloria looked over her shoulder, following Kevin’s gaze out the front door. “Oh,” she said quietly, “I asked him not to come.”

“Oh . . .” He said, a bit disappointed as the prospect of a hearts game fell through. “I’m sorry, but if it didn’t work out

between you two, then it's probably for the best." He was looking longingly at the deck of cards on the table thinking that a three-person game would have been fun, but maybe the two of them could still make do. "Why don't you deal the cards and tell me what he did." Kevin slid the cards in front of Veloria. "Sit down. A game of rummy will have your mind off of him in a heartbeat."

She did the death walk over to the couch and sat down. Kevin watched her curiously as she looked up at the ceiling and the walls around her, almost as though the house were itself made of cards and she was afraid it would collapse on her.

Trying to shuffle the deck before her she asked, "What time are my mom and Aunt Mod getting back?" she was buying time while she figured out how to begin.

Kevin thought about the girls' plans for a minute and did some deducing. "I'm thinking they should be home at around midnight. The show started at eight, they'll probably lollygag around a little and then drive home . . . 11:30 p.m. to midnight should be about right." He looked down at Veloria's hands still holding the deck of cards between them. She hadn't dealt yet and her tight grip was bending them. "Vel, you're bending the cards, sweetie." His brow furrowed as he noticed the look of distress on her face.

Looking down at the cards she released her grip slowly and apologized as she placed the cards back on the table and pushed them away, as if to say she'd had enough of them.

Kevin took the cue, smiled and said, “Alrighty then, let’s talk about Diego and the stupid thing he did to make you mad enough to ask him not to come here with you.” He paused and gently said, “sweetie, biting your nails won’t fix anything, either.”

It was a nervous habit she picked up when she was in elementary school. She used to do it at the dinner table when she was doing her homework and her mom would constantly walk by and remove her hand from her mouth and place it on her lap. Christine still corrects the habit if she happens by when Veloria is busy biting off a nail.

She stopped biting her nails and looked at her hands before sitting on them for good measure. A couple of minutes passed as she dug for the courage she needed to drop the bomb on her poor unsuspecting “uncle”. Then, like an active volcano, she spewed and spewed and spewed until everything she needed to say was on the table.

Speechless and dumbstruck, Kevin sat wishing as hell he hadn’t just heard everything he had been told. His head throbbed from the anger that swelled inside of him, but he knew he needed to be calm right now.

“Oh, I see...that’s why he’s not here right now.” *Because I’d fucking have to hurt him right now.* He felt the heat in his ears and could only guess they were as hot and red as hot tamales.

Relieved to have gotten it all out and feeling defenseless she said, “Uncle Kevin . . . I swear . . . I don’t know how it happened,” she said too quickly, making herself sound as ridiculous as her situation.

Kevin gave her an “Oh, come on” look to let her know he wasn’t buying it.

She got flustered then pulled her hair back out of her face with both hands before trying again. “I mean, I know how it happened, but I didn’t mean for it to happen.”

She earned another funny look from Kevin for sounding so naive; did she honestly believe that if she didn’t mean for it to happen it wouldn’t have happened? “Oh, Veloria . . .” he said with disappointment, as he attempted to process the situation. What should he say to her and how should he say it? The very last thing he wanted to do was to become a ranting parent, yelling at her and accusing her of being irresponsible, Bill and Christine will be doing enough of that for everyone. He felt awful, awful for her situation, for Bill and Christine and for Modra. He decided he would have to control his temper enough not to yell at her and that as much as he tried, he would not be able to control the heartbreaking disappointment he felt inside.

A big looming impenetrable wall loomed before him that said, STOP. PARENT TERRITORY. DO NOT ENTER! Veloria had become a very big part of their lives; she was truly the daughter they never had. But, regardless of that, it did not give him the permission to discipline her nor provide her with

advice in a situation like this. He and Modra had no vested interest in her future except for their good will toward her and that, he believed, left him with no choice but to direct her to her parents for counsel. Frankly, he wouldn't know what to advise her anyway. If it were his daughter in her position he would be marching her to the local Planned Parenthood and taking care of the situation immediately, but he wasn't sure how Bill and Christine felt about that. God, he thought looking away from her, what was she thinking when she got herself into this mess, or was she thinking at all?

“Uncle Kevin, say something. If I were your daughter what would your advice be?”

*If you were my daughter, I wouldn't give you advice. I would insist you did as I said.* He cleared his throat wishing so desperately his wife were home. “Ummm...”

*Don't! She is not your daughter. You cannot give her your advice!* He knew his internal voice was right, but he desperately wanted to tell her how he felt because he strongly believed it would be her best option. He glanced out the door with hesitation hoping for a miracle, but when Modra didn't appear he sagged his shoulders and asked Veloria, “I'm not so sure...who have you told?”

Veloria frowned at him for directing the questions back to her. She thought for a moment then admitted, “You're the only one I've told so far.”

*Should I be flattered that she came to me? Does this change the parent-advice rule at all?*

His conscience shot back, *“Only if you want to lose your friendship with Bill and Christine.”* He blinked back the stress and confusion that was churning within and let her continue.

Veloria was doing her best to avoid his eyes as she spoke. “I didn’t know until today.” She dropped her head and admitted with shame, “I couldn’t bring myself to take the test until mom and dad were out of the house because I wasn’t so sure I would be able to think straight if the result was positive. Honestly, when it was...positive, I was glad they weren’t home because I don’t think I could have faced them without breaking down.”

Kevin watched her with sadness. She looked so small and frail. He tried to picture her as a mother but couldn’t get past the fact that she was still a child herself.

*That explains her tardiness.* He thought of her pacing back and forth for hours, all by herself, trying to figure out what to do with her situation. That is an awful big burden for a young girl.

“So you haven’t even told Diego yet?” He was admittedly touched that she had come to him before the boyfriend, but it didn’t make the situation any easier for either of them. He wondered how the twenty-two-year-old would feel about the bundle of joy he was about to have with an eighteen-year-old who just graduated from high school and still lived at home. Wow, he thought, Veloria will have a lot of growing up to do, and quickly.

“No, and I don’t know how to tell him. I was supposed to be on the pill.”

Kevin scratched his head and rolled his eyes, allowing a bit of his frustration to become visible. “I’m sorry,” he apologized, still in disbelief. “Why *weren’t* you on the pill, if I may ask?”

*She is not your daughter for you to be asking her that.* He ignored his inner voice and kept his eyes on her to let her know that he was expecting an answer.

Veloria was his best friend’s daughter. She was her class valedictorian and had been accepted at UCSF where she was *supposed* to study to become a doctor just like her father. As he wondered to himself how such a bright young girl could make such a mistake, he reminded himself that being book smart and being life smart were two very different things. He began to wonder if this couldn’t be Bill and Christine’s fault as much as Veloria’s for keeping her so sheltered.

Either from embarrassment or frustration over Kevin’s question Veloria began to cry. Her tears poured out uncontrollably. At times her sobbing was so severe Kevin could barely make out her words. “I . . .” her voice trailed off in a quiver as she had a sobbing attack and had to pause to catch her breath before attempting to continue, “began taking the pill a year ago, but I never told mom.” She paused again to stabilize her shaky voice.

Kevin found himself admiring her for not becoming defensive. She was simply telling the facts.

“I began to get so nauseated that I skipped a couple of days.” Understanding the severity of her stupidity, she tried to explain herself for the sake of explaining and nothing more because nothing more could be accomplished at that point. “I didn’t want to ask Mom or Dad because...” snort, “even though they said they would get it for me if I asked...” snort, snort, “I knew mom would cry. So I called my friend, Nancy, who is almost seventeen and has been on the pill for almost a year. I just assumed she would know what I should do to get rid of the nausea.”

Kevin paused confused, “why didn’t you ask the school nurse?”

Veloria looked at Kevin as though he should know better, “Mrs. Spiegel is in mom’s book club.”

Kevin shut his eyes as he thought of the inadvertent consequences of living in a small town. Consequences such as your sexually active teenage daughter turning to an even younger sexually active teenager for birth control advice—WOW!

“Ok. What did your friend... Nancy say for you to do?”

Veloria paused, realizing the absurdity of what she was about to say, “Nancy said that when she gets nauseated she skips a few days from taking it.” Suddenly feeling the need to defend her naivety she added, “I don’t know why I listened to her. When she explained to me that the nausea was caused by the accumulation of the pill in your system, it just seemed to make sense. I sort of likened it to your Tegretol.” Veloria shrugged. “I

thought she knew about this stuff because she hasn't gotten pregnant and she's had a few boyfriends."

Kevin was stupefied. He used his hand to cover the disbelieving grin he received courtesy of the teenage stupidity he had just heard. "Okay, now I know how you got here," he said with dismay.

At that moment he found himself at a total loss for words. He was beginning to feel the pressure of the situation. If the decision of what to do with the baby were up to him, she would be getting an abortion immediately and moving on with her life, lesson learned. He truly believed that Veloria was a sheltered eighteen-year-old girl with absolutely no real-life experience. And he couldn't understand how a rude awakening, such as becoming a mother at her age, would benefit her or her baby. But she wasn't his daughter and that left him feeling as though he were in a vortex with red lights flashing danger all around him and this poor girl free falling through it at a distance just far away enough to be out of his reach.

"Veloria, I really want to help you, but I... I have to admit . . . only your mom and dad could know how to handle this situation. I just don't think I am the proper person to give you advice."

Veloria stared at him with disappointment then nodded. She was not at all sure what she had expected Kevin to do. "I know you're right. I guess I just wanted to tell someone who wasn't involved so that I could get an unbiased opinion."

*Ouch! That hurt.*

“Hold on,” Kevin jumped in. “You can’t believe that your aunt Mod and I don’t care about what you ultimately decide to do, or that we won’t be affected? We are very involved and our advice would be as biased as your parents because we love you! Your aunt Mod and I love you as if you were our own, only we didn’t give you your life—your mom and dad did that. They are your parents and they have paid their dues to be loved and respected the way parents should be. Please understand that it’s out of respect for them that I cannot and will not tell you what to do. What I can tell you is that although this may be hard right now, you will get through it and your parents will have to get through it with you. This doesn’t only affect you; it affects everyone who wants the best for you. Your mom and dad love you and will continue to love you after you (*break their hearts*) tell them that you’re pregnant. Always remember, there is nothing you can ever do that will change or erase their love for you. And know that your aunt Mod and I will also be here for you with additional love and support.” There, Kevin thought, that wasn’t too bad for a non-parent.

“I’m scared, Uncle Kevin,” Veloria confided. “I want to tell Mom and Dad, but I don’t know how.” her tears were gone; she had sobered up and reality had set in. “I am so afraid that I’m going to crush my father’s heart. He has placed so much trust in me and look at what I’ve done with it.”

She's right, Kevin thought, it won't be easy. But if they could all just get over the initial shock of the news, logic could prevail and allow them to focus on her situation and begin to work on possible solutions.

"I know it will be hard for you to come out and tell them." He paused for a moment to think of how they could help her, but decided this was way out of his league and he needed to talk to Modra before he committed them to anything. "Modra and I will try to help you, but I'm not sure exactly how yet. I'll talk to aunt Modra tonight and we'll come up with something for you by morning."

Veloria's face showed signs of life again. She was suddenly hopeful. But as her thoughts began to go through the motions of what it would be like to tell her parents, she started to deflate again. Her mother will be so disappointed with her and it will all be so visible in her eyes, as it always is when she disapproves. And her father, her poor father, she could picture his perpetual smile melting away and turning into sadness and disappointment.

She changed her mind. She didn't want to be the one to tell them. She wanted Kevin and Modra to tell them for her. It would be better that way. A panic struck her and she wanted to beg, to plead with him to please tell them for her! She didn't want to see the disappointment in their faces when they heard she was pregnant. She didn't want to see her father's heart being crushed with every word she said.

As if from nowhere, Kevin heard Veloria say, “I desperately need your help! Please! Please . . . please . . . help me, I feel like I can’t get my head above water! I need you and aunt Mod to be the ones who tells my parents because I just don’t think I can handle it!”

Kevin fell back against the couch, startled by the fear in her voice. He looked at the frightened girl sitting across from him and he couldn’t speak. He couldn’t utter one word. He wanted to help her, but he didn’t know how much he and Modra should meddle. He also wondered whether she shouldn’t be made to deal with her parents as a consequence of her behavior. Concentrating his eyes on the floor, he rubbed his hand over his scruffy chin, then pressed it against his neck to relieve a kink. Useless, he thought, I am absolutely the wrong person for Veloria to have come to. Why did she come to me? He took both of his hands and ran them through his hair before knotting them at the nape of his neck. He could feel her eyes on him, scrutinizing his every move like a loyal follower. He needed to be careful with every word he spoke because every word of advice had the risk of giving her false encouragement and/or contradicting her parents and their beliefs. The best bet would be for him to hold her off until Modra got home so they could figure something out together. His hands left his neck and went to his knees, pushing him up straight, as he locked his eyes on Veloria.

Her hands were slapped over her mouth and her eyes had become the size of saucers. “I’m sorry, I’m really sorry about my outburst, Uncle Kevin,” she said, her eyes begging for forgiveness. “I . . . I didn’t mean to say it out loud and corner you. I’m just so afraid to tell them.”

A supportive smile appeared on Kevin’s face. “Veloria, please don’t apologize.” He battled with himself. His need to help her contradicted his traditional ideology that children should be forced to face the consequences of their actions, but this was Veloria, and this mistake was out of character for her. Unfortunately, it was a big one, but an anomaly none the less.

“I can’t imagine the stress you’re under and it hurts me to see you in such an impossible situation.” It infuriated Kevin to know that he was clueless about how to proceed with advice, especially since he believed her only solution was to have an abortion. “Admittedly, the worst part of this is that I have absolutely no idea how to help you. I keep wishing Modra were here to tell me what to say.”

Veloria exhaled knowing her cause wasn’t lost...yet.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized again. Veloria could see that it pained Kevin not to be able to fix this for her.

Then, like a pop tart, Kevin propped himself up as soon as the thought hit him: Veloria wasn’t there asking him for help in getting an abortion, nor was she there asking for help with throwing her life away. No, the girl was sitting there before him asking for advice on the best way to tell her parents. She wanted

to tell her parents she was pregnant. She wanted to tell them so that they could help her with what to do next. All of a sudden he felt better because he could handle the task before him. He would be the buffer for her and she would feel that he came through for her and that she hadn't made a mistake by coming to him first.

She'd definitely put herself in a hell of a situation, but she was smart enough to seek guidance on her choices and their ramifications. Suddenly he decided that he and Modra needed to help her in any way they could. "Vel, why don't you let me talk to your Aunt Mod tonight; hopefully we can find a way to help you soften the blow when you deliver your . . . news." He wasn't sure what to call it. Should it be called: A mishap? A situation? A predicament? *It certainly was not a blessing.* He finally stopped worrying about what to call it as it hit him that of all the things to worry about, what to call it was not one of them. At that moment he officially conceded that people like him should never be parents.

Veloria smiled. "Oh thank you Uncle Kev.," she said, getting to her feet. "In the meantime, I think I should work up my courage to go tell Diego that I'm pregnant." She held her breath for a second and added, "with his baby."

Kevin cringed as she said it. It was still a hard pill for him to swallow, but he managed to nod and give her a crooked smile as encouragement.

“I can’t help you there,” he said, chuckling before he realized he was making humor, with a bad situation, at a bad time. He gritted his teeth and looked up certain that the gods had sat around high-fiving each other when he had had his vasectomy. He walked Veloria to the door, gave her a hug, and reminded her that everything would be fine. She gave him her best smile and awkwardly walked away.

As he watched her car pull out of their driveway he wondered how many parents around the world were facing the same predicament.

Deciding it was too Closter phobic inside, he decided to sit on a rocker. He proceeded to limp his way around the deck until he got to his favorite one. As he slowly took his seat, he wondered how Bill and Christine would deal with the news. Their eighteen-year-old daughter was pregnant. *Wow! They were so close. She was off to college in a couple of months.* He wondered what parents say to their young adult children when they make mistakes that impact their entire adult life ahead of them? Is an eighteen-year-old girl capable of understanding the lifetime consequences of choosing between keeping the baby or getting her doctorate? Kevin closed his eyes and put his head back, unable to stop thinking.

Could she choose to do both and actually accomplish it? He wondered. He couldn’t see how being a mother and full-time student could be a viable option. It was a stupid mistake to make at this age, he thought; it didn’t matter how you sliced it, the

forgone choice would cause as much heartache as the first. If he were the parent it would be a no-brainer, a career that provided his daughter a decent income and independence should absolutely be chosen over having a baby. She was fresh out of high school and he knew that Veloria would lose herself in the world of a crying baby and never reach her dream. For her to miss out on the entire college experience and the opportunities that come with a college degree would be stupid and irresponsible. It was not a tough choice for Kevin, but then, he was not her father . . . thank God.