



STEPHANIE'S STORY



Stephanie peeked through the Venetian blinds, watching her mother's car pull away until it disappeared around the corner. Then she kept her eyes glued on the empty street in front of the house for several seconds to make sure the car didn't come back.

"Stephanie, you should see yourself," Kate said with a little laugh. "You look like some kind of spy." Stephanie Cooper and Kate Holmes, both seventeen,



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had been best friends since fourth grade. They met because their older brothers had been best friends in high school. Summer vacation was nearly over for the two girls. The senior year they had anticipated so long together would start in two weeks.

“Mom sometimes forgets things and has to come back,” Stephanie said, still watching the street. Her mother, a grocery checker, worked the late shift today—4:30 until midnight. Stephanie wanted to make sure she was gone for the evening because she didn’t want to be interrupted.

“Would you rather catch a movie first and go for pizza later?” Kate asked. She was sitting cross-legged on the living-room floor studying the entertainment section of the newspaper. “We can get into the theater for half price before six.”

Convinced that her mother was gone, Stephanie finally turned away from the window to face her friend. She released a long sigh. “I don’t want to go out tonight.”

Kate looked up from the paper, surprised. “You told me last night you wanted to do pizza and a movie tonight.”

Stephanie sat down on the floor with her friend. “I know, but that was last night.”

“Do you still have a touch of the flu?”

Stephanie dropped her head. “No, I don’t have the flu.”



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"Well then...what?" Kate waited for an explanation.

Stephanie picked at her fingernails. "We have to talk," she said, avoiding eye contact.

Those four words were among the most serious spoken between the two friends. Both knew that the topic to follow was important. They had used the phrase only a few times during their seven years of friendship. Stephanie had used it once because a cute boy had turned her close relationship with Kate into a fierce rivalry. After they'd talked, they decided no boy was worth jeopardizing their friendship. And when Kate had said, "We have to talk," during their sophomore year, it was to announce that she had trusted Christ as her Savior through the ministry of her youth group at church. Stephanie was so impressed with the change in her friend that she began attending church with her and trusted Christ two months later. As sisters in Christ, their friendship had grown even stronger.

Stephanie felt Kate's eyes boring into the top of her head. "What's wrong, Steph?" she asked, totally serious.

Stephanie didn't want to answer. She had spent nearly three months trying to convince herself that there was nothing wrong. Up until two hours ago, she almost believed it.

"What's going on, Stephanie?" Kate probed with loving sisterly insistence. She leaned forward and

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touched her friend on the knee. “You know you have to tell me. Whatever it is, you know it’s okay.”

A tide of despair mixed with panic rolled up Stephanie’s throat. When she finally looked up, her chin was trembling and tears flooded her eyes. “Kate, I’m pregnant.” Then the dam burst and Stephanie could say no more. Burying her face in her hands, she sobbed in anguish.

“Stephanie, no!” Kate shrieked in disbelief. She rolled up on her knees and gripped her friend by the shoulders. For a full minute, Stephanie cried hard, and Kate just held her and let her own tears flow.

As the crying subsided, Kate was in Stephanie’s face. “What happened? Did you miss a period? Some girls miss periods and they’re not pregnant, Steph. Maybe it’s something else. You can’t be sure.”

It was another half minute before Stephanie could respond. Wiping her eyes and nose with tissues Kate provided, she said, “I’m sure. I went to the doctor today—a clinic across town. I already missed two periods. The flu I told you about—that I told myself was the flu—was morning sickness. I’m almost three months pregnant, Kate. I... I...” Another wave of tears choked off her words.

“Oh, Stephanie,” Kate whimpered, tearing up again. She enveloped Stephanie in her arms and cried with her, repeating softly, “It’s okay. I’m here. We’ll get through this together.”




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After a couple of minutes, they were again facing each other, seated on the floor. Kate continued to hold Stephanie's hand. "What about your mom?" Kate said, dabbing her eyes.

Stephanie slowly shook her head. "She doesn't know. Nobody knows except me and you—and the doctor at the clinic."

Another minute passed in silence, except for an occasional snuffle. Stephanie drank in the comfort of her friend being there for her. She appreciated the fact that Kate was not bugging her with the inevitable questions: who, when, and how? But she realized that Kate deserved to know the answers.



Stephanie spoke softly. "Remember when Mom and I flew to the West Coast for my grandmother's funeral the first of June?"



"Yes. You were gone a whole week."

Stephanie nodded. "Well, there's this guy back there—Brent. As a kid, I saw him every summer when we went to my dad's parents for vacation. We played together and had crushes on each other—just kid stuff, that's all, because we were just little kids. After Dad and Mom divorced four years ago, I stopped going back there in the summer. I never thought about Brent again.

"Seeing him in June, I couldn't believe it. He was so different, so grown up. When I wasn't with my family, I was with Brent. We had so much fun, and

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by the end of the week I was spending most of my time with him. The old childish attraction came back, except we weren't kids anymore. One thing led to another, and on Friday night we ... didn't stop.

"The whole week was unreal, like being in a movie or something. I kept telling myself that what I did back there didn't count. I came home wishing I hadn't done it and trying to brush the whole thing out of my mind. I didn't tell you anything because I guess I didn't want to admit there was anything to tell. Then I missed a period and started feeling sick in the morning. When I missed my second period, I knew I had to find out for sure. I put it off until today. I might have been able to keep denying it, except the test proves I'm pregnant."

The girls were silent for several seconds. Finally, Kate said, "Do you think you should tell Brent?"

Stephanie looked away, misty-eyed. "I don't know what to think, Kate," she said, sighing heavily. "My whole life changed two hours ago. I'm so embarrassed and ashamed. I feel so dirty. All the plans we had for our senior year." Her words trailed off to a sad whimper. "I don't know what to do."

Kate straightened up. "I know somebody who can help. We need to go see Jenny." Jenny Shaw and her husband, Doug, were volunteer youth leaders at the church Kate and Stephanie attended. Jenny had



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disciplined each girl individually for several weeks after they trusted Christ.

"I can't tell Jenny about this," Stephanie objected. "I can hardly bear the thought of telling my mom. I don't want anybody at church to know. I just want to ... go away."

Kate's face registered shock. "You don't mean to the West Coast, do you?"

Stephanie felt lost. After several seconds she said, "I don't know, Kate. I'm not in love with Brent, but maybe some day I could be. I don't know what to do about telling my mom. And I don't know what to do about this baby. I just want to run away and hide."

"I love you, Stephanie, and I can't let you do that," Kate said firmly. "We will get through this like we get through everything else: together. But we can't do it alone. We need to call Jenny. She'll know what to do, and she won't blab to anyone."

Stephanie knew her friend was right, but she felt so embarrassed. "Maybe Jenny won't have time to talk to us," she argued feebly.


That was all the permission Kate needed. Reaching for the phone book, she said, "We won't know until we ask." Doug and Jenny Shaw owned and operated a quick-print shop downtown. Kate looked up the number and tapped it into the phone.

"Kate, I—"




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“Trust me, Steph,” Kate interrupted. “I won’t do anything to embarrass you.” Then Jenny Shaw came on the line. As Stephanie listened, Kate arranged for the three of them to get together later that night. Jenny’s husband, Doug, was leaving for the church men’s retreat at 6:00. Kate and Stephanie would pick up a pizza and take it to Jenny’s house by 6:30 for an evening of “girl talk” and a sleepover. Kate mentioned nothing about the shocking news.



Two hours later, Stephanie reluctantly followed Kate up to Jenny’s door. They were loaded down with sleeping bags, overnight bags, and a large five-topping boxed pizza. Jenny Shaw’s cheery welcome and sisterly hug boosted Stephanie’s spirits. “I’m so glad you called,” Jenny said. “With Doug gone for the weekend, I needed company tonight.”



Stephanie tried to hide the dark tide of despair that had been rising steadily inside her since the clinic visit. But as they sat down around the pizza box, Jenny eyed the sad face across the table and asked, “Is everything okay with you?”

Stephanie lost it again. During a torrent of tears, her story of pregnancy tumbled out while the pizza got cold in the box. Jenny and Kate moved over beside Stephanie. “It’s OK, Stephanie,” they said, crying with her, “let it all out.” The hesitancy Stephanie had felt about telling Jenny quickly melted in the warmth of her comforting embrace and sympathetic tears.



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"My life is ruined," Stephanie moaned sadly. "I don't know if I can finish high school, let alone go to college."

"I know it hurts a lot right now," Jenny consoled. "I'm so sorry."

"And I'm so ashamed. How can I face my friends at school? And how can I tell them I'm a Christian after what I've done?"

Jenny rubbed her back gently. "I'm so sorry for you, Stephanie. But Kate and I are here for you."

"Worst of all, I have committed a terrible sin," Stephanie said in a quavering voice. "Premarital sex is against the Bible. It's something I promised God I would never do. I know He is disappointed with me. And Kate and I committed that we would both be virgins when we married. I failed God and my best friend. I feel so worthless."

After a few minutes, Jenny suggested that they spend some time praying together. She encouraged Stephanie to bring her feelings and guilt to God while she and Kate prayed with her silently.

As they all held hands, Stephanie prayed, "God, You know what I'm feeling before I even tell You, but I need to say that I'm feeling so ashamed right now. I wish I could turn back the clock and change what I did. But I can't. I also wish these awful feelings would go away, but I can't stop feeling them."



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Jenny prayed next. “Dear Lord, I hurt for Stephanie right now. There’s no way I can really know what she’s going through, but it hurts to see her feeling so much pain. You can look into her heart and see the pain. Help her to know that you haven’t stopped loving her, that you are willing to carry her sorrow and ease her pain.”

Kate added a prayer for God to comfort her friend. Then Stephanie prayed again. “God, I have sinned. I realize that I have disobeyed you and hurt you. My pregnancy is a result of my disobedience. It’s hard to accept, but I also know that you love me. you sent your Son to die for my sins. So I ask you to forgive me right now and take control of my life from this moment on.”

After several more minutes of prayer and comforting words, Jenny said, “You know you have some decisions to make, Stephanie.” Stephanie nodded. “But I don’t think tonight is the best time. We’re all pretty emotionally drained. I suggest that we eat dinner, watch a video or two, and just be together. Tomorrow morning after breakfast we can start talking about these decisions. Would that be okay with both of you?”

Stephanie agreed quickly. “My brain is frazzled. I can’t even think straight. Tomorrow would be much better.” Kate nodded.

Then Stephanie said, “I just want to say that you two are incredible. It means so much to me to have



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you here with me right now. I don't know what I would do without you.”

“We love you, Steph,” Kate said. “That’s what friends are for.”

After another round of caring embraces, Jenny said, “Now let’s nuke this pizza and see how fast we can make it disappear!”