

The Waiting Room of an ER

Part Three of a Nine Part Series

by **Eric Heise**

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Mira ran her fingers through her hair, her head down.

“Dr. Brewster,” the speaker in the hall announced, “please report to ER.”

Mira sighed, feeling both surreal and comfortable. She looked up and around the waiting room of St James Memorial and then out into the lobby through the wide-open doorway to her left and back to the table in front of her. She briefly sifted through the magazines, selecting a *People* only to toss it back on the table. She ran her right hand through her long dark hair, folding the right side and turned her head back to the lobby.

She'd been in there twenty minutes, maybe thirty she figured according to the clock on the wall behind the nurse's station. It was hard to figure. Thing got confusing after Martin was put in the ambulance and she insisted on riding along. But her mind wasn't up to that point yet. It was a few steps back.

“I'm not sure I can explain it to you, Martin,” Mira said. She was tired of having to examine her feelings. “I told I wasn't ready and I'm just not. I can't explain it to you any better way.”

Martin gripped the steering wheel, pulling it towards him a little. “You know, I don't understand you. We've been together through thick and thin for what, five years now? We live together, we live apart, we get back together cause we're miserable alone. We know we're right for each other, yet I ask you to marry me, you say no. This is what you wanted, a husband. Now I'm giving it to you. You wanted to get married three years ago. Had I asked you then, would we be divorced now?”

“That's an impossible question to answer. Why the hell would you ask that?”

“I wanna know.”

“No, you want an argument. You want a fight so that you can bully me into agreeing with you. Well, I'm sorry, I'm just not going to change my mind. I know how I feel.”

Martin came to a stop at the light. He turned to her. “Then how do you feel, for Christ's sake? Jesus Christ, I figure this is what you want and then you change your mind and don't give me this shit that it's a woman's purgative to change her fucking mind, cause I don't buy into that fucking Gloria Steinham horseshit. You're such a fucking flake, I can never get a straight vibe from you.”

“Then why the hell do you want to get married for?” She was yelling now, and realized it. The two sat coy and Mira looked around to see if anyone was eaves dropping. An old black woman stood

at a corner to the right. She looked at the Cavalier and shook her head. “Martin, look I know you’re upset -.”

“Bet your ass I’m upset,” he said looking forward.

“Look, I don’t want to fight with you and I don’t want you out of my life, but I need some time to think,” she said.

“Think about being with me?”

“This isn’t about you,” she snapped. “This is about me.” The light changed and Martin pulled back into traffic easily. “This is what’s best for me and the future for us. I just don’t know what any of it holds, for either one of us.”

“Yeah, anything could happen, like being sucked up into a spaceship of aliens or World War 3 or shit, I could go fucking gay.” He looked over to her. “Christ, there’s this new guy at the gym with some ass on him. Maybe I’ll ask him out.”

She sighed. “Why can’t you just grow up about this?”

“I was being grown up! You’re the one with s commitment dilemma!”

“Simmons?” The nurse asked the waiting room. Mira snapped out of her trance and looked up to see a large black woman in a colorful nurse’s outfit. “The doctor is ready to see you now.”

“Martin? What about my boyfriend Martin?” Mira asked standing up. “How is he?”

“I don’t know, miss, but the doctor can see you now.”

“But I feel fine.”

“Let the doctor determine that. She waiting to see you in room 402.”

“I feel fine, I just want to know about Martin.” The nurse led her to the examine room.

“Honey, I just don’t know, but when someone can tell you something, they’ll be right out. But for now, let’s just get you checked out ok?”

Mira wanted to argue, but had trouble thinking of anything original. By the time she thought of asking where he was, the nurse had already left her alone. She looked at the padded exam table and sat up on it. The doctor walked in looking at a clipboard.

“Mira? I’m Dr. Turner. It says here you were involved in an automobile accident?”

“Yes, how’s Martin?” The doctor looked at her questioning. “My boyfriend. They brought him in an ambulance. I insisted on riding with him. They brought him in a room, but they wouldn’t let me in and he was bleeding from his head and wasn’t awake. I kept calling to him but he wouldn’t wake up.”

“Hold on, hold on,” Dr. Turner said. “First things first. Let’s get you checked out.”

Mira hopped off the table. “No, I want to know about Martin.”

The doctor held her hands up. “I know, I know you do. I don’t have any answers for you. My job is to make sure you’re okay. After that I can check on your friend. But in the meantime, I have to check and make sure you’re not injured.”

“But I feel fine,” Mira said. “I just want to know about Martin.”

“Then you’re most likely fine and I know you want to know how Martin is doing. All I can tell you is that he is being well looked after. Let’s get you cleared and then we can find out about Martin, all right?” Mira stood silent. “Okay?” Mira nodded and slid back on the table. “Okay, now let me just look in your eyes for a moment.” The doctor held a light up to Mira’s left eye and looked at it peering. “Tell me, how did the accident happen?”

“What does marriage have to do with being a grown up, Martin?” Mira snapped. “My sister got married at nineteen and divorced by twenty-one and she’s no where near grown up status.”

“I’m talking commitment, Mira, not moral need because you got pregnant by a jerk with no career aspirations.” Martin sighed. “All I’m saying is that I don’t understand. You seemed to want to get married and then when I bring it up, you’re not interested. Or just not interested in me.”

“Listen, I don’t want to fight with you,” Mira said. “I just can’t give you a concrete answer as to why I feel this, I just do. Okay, can we please just drop it.”

Martin let out a frustrated grunt. “What is wrong?” She asked.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong is that I can’t get a friggin’ answer out of you, that’s what’s wrong. You’ve become completely impossible to deal with lately and I’m not sure where it’s come from, but I do know that I need more from you than this stupid indecisiveness.”

Mira turned her head and looked out the window, watch them pass building after building. “I’m sorry, I really am sorry, but I meant it when I said I needed some time to think things through. I just don’t want to make any mistakes. Us to make to make any mistakes. Okay?”

Martin grunted. “Sure. Whatever.” Mira looked at him and frowned softly. She looked down, but not before something – a person caught her eye out of the right side. Her interest drew her atten-

tion and she saw what seemed to be a tan skinned guy, maybe a kid, in a denim jacket about to cross right in front of them and several other cars in an intersection where Martin had a green light.

“Oh, Martin, watch it,” was what she managed. Martin realized what she meant a second and a half later where he saw the same guy, the guy with the weird bulge in his jacket cross right in front of him and another car. He had two choices as he stomped his foot on the brake pedal. He could either hit the kid or hit the car to his left.

Martin cut the steering wheel hard to his left, shifting his body over towards Mira. Mira gasped as Martin missed the guy and slammed very hard into the car. Martin was thrown into the windshield and dashboard, providing a cushion for Mira who was also wearing a seat belt. She jolted forward, bounced off Martin and then was slumped back into her seat.

“Okay, one more deep breath for me, nice and easy,” Dr. Turner said. She held the stethoscope against Mira’s back and listened to Mira breath her uneven patterns of nervousness and anxiety. “Okay, you’re good. There doesn’t seem to be any injuries. You were very lucky. That seat belt probably saved your life,” she said pointing to her. She wrote something on her chart. “Mira, I am going to prescribe a relaxant. You’re a little shaken up from the accident and that is perfectly normal. This prescription will help you sleep. I only prescribed a couple for the next few days and only if you need them. Okay?” She wrote some more on a pad of paper, torn it off and handed it to Mira. “If you feel any discomfort at all I want you to come straight in. Now, you can get dressed. I’ll go see if I can find out anything on Martin and will be right back.”

“Thank you,” Mira managed.

The doctor smiled and said, “Sure,” before leaving the room and Mira all alone. She hopped off the table, intending to put her clothes back on, but got back on it and cried hard for a minute. She thought of the accident and how she was probably alive because of the seat belt, but also because Martin padded her frontal impact. She wiped her eyes with her hands and calmed down, able to put her clothes on. She was finishing tucking in her shirt when Dr. Turner came in. She wasn’t alone.

“Mira, this is Dr. Constance. He’s been treating Martin,” Dr Turner said.

Constance smiled with a deep grin. Mira noticed he looked like most doctors she’d seen on TV, dark hair, 5 o’clock shadow, tall. Probably drove a Beemer, she thought. He extended his hand to Mira, which she took as some good news, but he had some dark stains on his green hospital smock and they looked a little too fresh to be morning coffee stains.

“Hello Mira, why don’t you sit down on the table,” he said.

“I want to know about Martin,” she said and felt like crying again.

“Martin has sustained some very serious injuries,” he said. Mira slipped back on the table. “We’re bringing him up to the operating room now.”

“What’s wrong with him? Is he going to be all right?” She was sobbing.

“This is very complicated, Mira. I won’t lie to you. He has a good chance, but he has suffered some very serious internal bleeding that we have been able to hold under control, but we’re going to have to operate to repair most of the damage. There’s also a lot of damage to his face and head.”

“Oh my God!” She covered her mouth and cried hard. She thought of the time they were on a picnic at Borderland with her aunt’s dog a few springs ago, before they had become a problem couple. She remembered how blue his eyes were against his tanned skin and dark hair and how they looked like the sky when she looked into them. She remembered his grin and his nose and how that nose curved to the right from a punch by one of his friends in high school while they were in karate class. It had given him an edgy look.

“Now, Mira, this is important. We think he has a chance, I believe he has a chance and if he’s a fighter, we’re already ahead of the game. But we’re going to need several things. I need you to get some recent photographs of his face, as many profiles as possible. He’s going to require some reconstructive surgery.”

“Is he going to live?”

“We’re going to do our best but right now, I need to get back up to him and make sure that happens. There’s a nurse that will come around and get some information from you. You can give her the photographs. We’ll need those as soon as we can, but first things first. I need to get up there and get him through this, okay?” He looked at her with his dark eyes and she thought for a minute he was patronizing her as a child. Then she realized how hysterical and out of control she had become in the sixty seconds he’d been there and she didn’t blame him. There was a knock at the door and the black nurse from the waiting room came in. “I have to go. I’ll let you know as soon as I can.” And with that he was gone.

“Mira, this is Nurse Mathews and she’ll get the necessary information from you, okay?” Dr Turner said. “I also prescribed a few tablets of mesythacanton to relax her. Maybe we can find her some while she’s here.”

“Of course, doctor,” the nurse said and she went over to Mira with her arm coming around Mira’s shoulders. “He’ll be just fine. That Dr. Constance is just about the best there is around here. Now why don’t we come over to one of the offices where it’s more comfortable so we can get some information and a hot cup of coffee.” She led Mira out in to the hallway and to a room not far from the waiting room and nurse’s station.

Mira came to slowly; first hearing and then seeing the steam come out of the hood of Martin’s car. She looked around, hearing nothing but the steam and then slowly people’s voices. Martin was slumped off to his left and blood was oozing from a large gash on his forehead.

“Oh my Jesus!” She exclaimed. “Oh my God, Martin! Martin! Somebody help! *Somebody please help me!*”

Martin wasn't moving and had settled in an awkward position that Mira immediately determined was not good. She looked out the windshield, which had spider webbed and saw a mess of cars outside. She looked around for people but was too frantic to really notice anything coherent. “Martin! Martin, answer me, please! Please, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.” She cried in hysterics. Someone came to Martin's door and immediately didn't like what he saw.

“Oh my God,” he said holding back the curling in his stomach. “Are you okay, lady?” Mira couldn't answer. She started to shake. “Just hold still lady, there's an ambulance on it's way.” Stepped away from the door. “We got a bad on here!” Peering back in, he said, “Are you hurt, lady? Are you hurt?” She didn't answer. Another man, this one a lot older came to her door and pulled it open. It creaked but it did open and wide.

“Are you all right?” He asked. “Are you hurt? Can you move? We have to get you out of the car in case it goes up.” The man ran his arm around Mira's shoulder and started to pull her out of the car.

“No, I won't leave Martin,” she screamed. She tried to pull back in the car, but couldn't get control. Sirens squealed and got louder.

“The medics are almost here,” he said. “They'll take care of him. You gotta get free of the car.” She went with them, dazed and surreal. The man, and a small group of others led her to a police car that had just pulled up on the opposite side of the accident. The officer opened his rear door so that she could sit down, but Mira was shaking too much to do much of anything. She watched the paramedics jump out of the ambulance and race towards Martin and some of the other cars. She saw in the middle of the whole mess that guy with the denim jacket lying on the street mangled and bloody. All over him and around him was white powder, coming mainly from his jacket.

“We got a bad one, here,” one medic yelled after examining Martin for a good second. “Get Memorial on the phone, this is a bad one.”

“Oh, no,” Mira whimpered.

A woman in a medic uniform joined him carrying a large orange case. The man pulled at Martin's door, but it wouldn't open. He waved to the fire engine and a fireman in fireman's garb ran towards the car with a crowbar. A minute later, the fireman and his crowbar pulled the door open and cleared the way for the medics to tend to Martin. “Jesus, this guy is in rough shape,” the woman said quietly. “We gotta get him to Memorial now. We can't wait.”

“Right,” the man agreed. He waved for the stretcher to be brought over. Two firemen joined and the group of EMTs pulled Martin from the car and on to the stretcher. Mira pulled away from the cop and his cruiser, running toward Martin.

“M'am, we need you to stay back,” the man said.

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“No, he’s my boyfriend,” Mira said. “I’m coming with you.” Before anyone could argue with her, she was inside the ambulance with Martin and racing towards Memorial. She sat towards the front of the ambulance, watching the EMTs work on Martin, unable to breath and think.

“Now, his name is Martin, and what’s his last name?” The nurse asked. She sat across the desk from Mira.

“Ah, Walters. Martin Walters,” Mira said refocusing her attention. The nurse typed the name into the computer.

“Do you know his address?”

“Ah, um, yeah. It’s the same as mine,” Mira said and rattled off the information automatically. It didn’t seem right to her, the information, but it had to have been. As a rule of thumb, accountants aren’t creative people and Mira was no different. She knew numbers, not fiction.

“Does he have insurance?”

Mira shrugged. “I don’t know.” And she didn’t.

“Any kind of policy, maybe with his place of employment.”

“I would imagine he does,” Mira said thinking. “Of course he must. He works for a big company.”

“What’s the name of the company?”

“Causeway Networks,” she said. “No, wait, he worked for them a few years ago, but now he’s with Principle Networks in South Hampton.” The nurse looked at her cautiously. Mira stared off to the middle distance and nodded. “Yeah, because he complains about the commute and how much of a hassle it is and how it’s barely worth the extra money. He was thinking of leaving, I think.”

“Principle Networks in South Hampton?” The nurse asked. “You sure?”

Mira nodded. “Yeah, I think so.”

The nurse typed into the computer. “I have a record of Principle using Diamond Health and Life insurance as a medical carrier. Does that sound right?”

Mira shrugged. “I don’t know. I wouldn’t know. Maybe. You’d think that after living with someone for a couple of years that you’d know who they have medical insurance with, at least.” She gave a nervous laugh but the nurse didn’t smile.

Mira sat and watched the nurse type information into the computer. She thought about what else she might ask about Martin and whether she’d be able to answer the questions or not.

“I’m going to call Diamond and see if they can verify the insurance policy. A lot of times they’ll just give us the information when we need it in a situation like this,” Nurse Mathews said. “This’ll just take a moment.” The nurse dialed the number and was immediately involved in a conversation with a representative with the insurance company. Mira looked at her hands and saw no jewelry. Martin had never given her any jewelry, not even for an anniversary. But Mira couldn’t think of if they even had an anniversary. They had broken up many times and even their start was shaky, with him on several business trips the first few months they had met and she involved with someone else at the time. She knew it was the late summer, because they had both met each other at Steven Jenkins’ Labor Day bash on the beach. They had taken a walk on the beach after dark and had sex near some rocks. The next time they saw one another, she had worn a coat because it had become so cold. Martin didn’t even meet her parents until a wedding the following summer and she still had never met one of his sisters who lives in Seattle. It was no wonder they could never get a long.

Five years and where was everything? She didn’t know, she didn’t know anything. She didn’t even know if she would ever see Martin again. From what the doctor said – and didn’t say, Martin was in some tough shape and in for a fight. One thing was for certain, if she ever did see him again, she’d make things a lot different between them.

“I got the information I needed,” the nurse said hanging up the telephone. “He does work for Principle and has excellent medical coverage with Diamond,” she said sounding more like informing than verifying. “I’ll process the paperwork from here. That’ll speed everything up.”

“”Dr. Constance said he needed pictures of Martin?” Mira asked, hoping she heard him wrong.

“Oh, yes, those are very important, child,” the nurse said. “When we’re done here, I’ll check with the head nurse in surgery. She’ll be able to give me a good list. But you may have to act fast. Do you have any pictures local?”

Mira nodded. “Yes, I believe so.” She was sure about this. She and Martin were always clicking pictures of each other as a goof. She had a hundred rolls of him if she had one picture.

“Good, I was going to say if you don’t, but he has family far away who does, we’ll make arrangements to have them sent electronically,” the nurse replied.

“No, I’m sure,” Mira said. “I have lots of them.”

Nurse Mathews hummed and continued to type. Mira heard an anxious shout out in the hallway and her attention was cut away again.

“Blood pressure is one ten over eighty. Hang in there, Martin, we’re almost there!” The EMT said. The two technicians worked on Martin, the woman placed a breathing mask over his mouth while the man tended to the gash on his forehead.

Mira sat and watched, almost hovering in an out of body reality. She sobbed, feeling guilty and numb. The sirens squealed and rang through intersection after intersection until the ambulance reached its destination of the emergency room entrance. It backed to the door, technicians still working on Martin furiously. Outside, nurses and doctors opened the doors of the ambulance and Martin was pulled out and quickly wheeled inside. Mira followed in toe, staying so close she nearly tripped a doctor as he read Martin's pulse. The group, now four people plus Martin and Mira reached the swinging doors of the ER and fired inside. A nurse stopped Mira abruptly, grabbing her shoulders and said, "I'm sorry, but you will have to wait out here." She signaled to a nurse, Nurse Mathews in fact to help keep Mira out, show her the waiting room and get some information on her so that she could be examined.

"No, I want to be with him," Mira said.

"Please, I need to you to stay out here and let us do our job," the nurse insisted. Inside Martin's clothes were being cut off and a trauma was working to get the injuries sustained.

Mira breathed heavy and watch wide eyed. The nurse said something to her and guided her to the waiting area. Mira looked back at the ER, seeing people more frantically around Martin's body. The nurse asked Mira's name and she managed to squeeze that information out, but very little else. The nurse scribbled the information on an admittance form and asked her to have a seat in the waiting area. In shock, Mira sat and her breathing settled down. Several other people from the accident site filed into the ER, most were fine and it seemed to Mira that Martin had the worst injuries of all of them, though she never saw the young guy with the tanned skin and denim jacket come in. The last she saw of him was lying on the street with his body mangled and white powder everywhere around him. There was one who she didn't think she saw at the accident, an older guy who was wheeled in on a gurney. He was dressed in clothes that Mira thought were out of style fifteen years ago and he kept an appearance like he tried to look innocent and respectable, but she sensed something darker and mischievous about him. He also looked like Bela Karolyi, the world famous gymnastics coach who took Nadia Comaneci and Mary Lou Retton to Gold Medal glory in several Olympic games. She remembered watching the gymnastic events, enthralled with their abilities and how Karolyi seemed to be able to motivate his gymnasts right when they needed to score a perfect ten to win a gold medal. He looked an awful lot like Karolyi, but she decided it couldn't possibly be him, mostly because he dressed so bad. Her attention swayed and her mind went blank again as she sat waiting in the waiting room of the emergency room.

Nurse Mathews waived to the police officer at the nurse's station. He'd been talking with a younger nurse about the accident and the victims that were brought in. The cop noticed Nurse Mathews and walked to her and Mira as they left the office. "This policeman will need to get a report from you, Mira. Afterwards, he can bring you home to get some of those photographs if you want, or I can call you a friend or relative," the nurse said. She seemed sincere enough to Mira, such as a school nurse would sincere to a student who had just thrown up her lunch in the girl's room after seeing her first menstrual cycle start.

Mira hadn't called anyone about the accident. Martin had family in the area, but his parents were a few hours away. She would have to call them, no less, but couldn't think of where Martin might keep their number. She couldn't remember the last time he called them from home. She now realized how little she did know about Martin and about the both of them. Mira wanted – needed someone to help, a friend and if she hadn't been at odds with her mother, she'd call her. Did Martin know that she and her mother didn't get along very well, Mira wondered. The cop and the nurse looked at Mira waiting for an answer. She thought of calling her friends Jessie, and that seemed like a good place to start.

“My friend Jessie, she can probably drive me, if that's okay with everyone,” Mira said feeling innocent and guilty.

“Of course dear, of course,” the nurse said wrapping that arm around her shoulders again. “Why don't we come over here and the desk nurse will call her and have her come get you while the officer takes your accident report.” Nurse Mathews led Mira behind the counter and sat her down. The cop offered to get everyone a cup of coffee and he disappeared. Mira sat quietly and stared at the floor as the nurse dialed Jessie. She thought of the mistakes he had made in her life, mostly her life with Martin and wondered if he'd get a chance to make things right, make things better. She looked at the clock and knew Martin would be in surgery for a while, possibly seven or eight hours if he's to survive. The hospital had a plastic surgeon coming in later to start the facial work, if it looked like he might survive.

She sat behind the nurse's counter, staring at nothing but in her mind she was trying to see the future, trying to get a sense of it's direction and maybe, just maybe she could focus her attention on progressing forward, as she should have been doing all along, because God know she and Martin may have not have ended up like this had thing just been a little different between them.

- end -