

Chapter 3

That Morning

On March 10, 2010, Dan and I talked together while we lay in bed for just a few minutes longer. The nursery across the hall remained quiet, but I didn't wait much longer before checking on Ty.

I walked into the nursery and peered into the crib. It looked empty, except for the baby quilt crumpled in the middle. Confused, and knowing he must be under there, I held my breath, fear tightening my chest. I tore off the blanket and saw Ty lying there, motionless. In horror, I shrieked Dan's name as I scooped up our son's limp body.

Even from the bedroom, Dan seemed to know. He yelled, "No! No!" over and over, running into the nursery as I lay Ty on the changing table. Dan's hollering continued, his voice weighted with terror and anger.

"Stop it! Dan, stop it!" Though my heart still pounded, a sudden calmness came over me, and I could

think with clarity. I asked Dan to call the police, which seemed to bring him out of his shock. “Okay,” he said, grabbing his phone.

While he spoke with dispatch, I placed my mouth over Ty’s and gave him two breaths, but they didn’t seem to work. I swiped his tiny mouth with one finger and then pushed against his tongue. I attempted the breaths again, and relief swept through me as I watched Ty’s chest rise and fall. Having received my CPR certification practicing on adult mannequins, I never thought my first time performing CPR would be on my four-and-a-half-month-old son. But there I was, adjusting his forehead and chin to an angle where I could gently breathe air into him. I pumped his chest with two fingers, watching a hint of blue fade from his lips.

Much of the anxiety left my body. I thought I would save him. This is why I had been trained in CPR for the last five years, my job aside. I would save my son.

My efforts lasted less than a minute before Dan let a police officer into our home. I stepped aside and allowed him to take over. Dan and I watched him examine Ty as we struggled to fight off the consuming fear. The paramedics arrived a couple minutes later and set up equipment in the living room. Trained help had arrived, and I thought—dared to hope—everything might be okay. However, when the officer fled from the nursery with my son in his arms, my hysteria set in. It was in that moment that I realized I was no longer in control. My son’s life was literally out of my hands, and there was nothing more I could do.

Screaming “Please save my baby,” I chased after the officer, who handed Ty to the paramedics. Dan grabbed me and pulled me into his chest, preventing me from witnessing the scene. We clung to each other, both crying and praying out loud, begging God not to take our son. I told Heavenly Father I would be the best mother if He’d only save Ty and give me this one more chance. My soul was filled with desperation and terror. Stepping away from me, Dan punched holes in the nursery wall, each one an evidence of his agony.

An investigator and policewoman kept us in the nursery. Regaining temporary composure, Dan held me in the rocking chair while we waited to hear our baby cry again. But the only sound was our own grief. As parents we felt powerless. We could do nothing but pray and console one another, quieting each other’s fears before unleashing our wild terror all over again.

Just as the paramedics drove away with Ty in the ambulance, my dad arrived to take Dan and me to the hospital. After collapsing and sobbing in my dad’s arms, I couldn’t think of what I needed. I had no idea what I was supposed to do. Shock had set in. The female police officer verbally guided me step by step to find a bra, to find my socks, my shoes, and my wallet. Like a zombie, I followed her instructions before leaving home.

Concerned neighbors watched from a distance. In my hazy state, the gravity of the situation struck me again, and I fell apart in the car. As we drove to the hospital, I knew things would never be the same. Even if Ty were to live, with the lack of oxygen to his brain he would

not be the same little boy we put to bed last night. We tried to figure out the timeline of his last breaths. I had checked on him at 4:00 AM. Dan checked on him at 7:00. We didn't make it into the nursery again until 8:40.

In the emergency room, it sickened me to see Ty's little body on the table, surrounded by doctors and nurses and medical tools that seemed too large and much too severe for him. Still, Dan and I had to keep hoping. As long as they worked on our baby, there was still hope.

The moment felt surreal—madness whirling around Dan and me as we gripped each other's hands. This couldn't be happening, not to us. Not after everything we'd learned and been through while waiting for Ty's birth. Not after God promised him to me.

When the doctor approached us with remorse in his eyes, admitting there was nothing more they could do for our son, Dan and I crumpled to the floor, wailing in each other's arms.

“That's my baby! My boy!”

In the movies, it almost seems a stereotypical reaction to hear the mother crying “No! No! No, no, no!” over and over, as if that would change anything—as if she could trade in her broken heart to alter the outcome. But there I was, playing the role of the shattered mother, crippled beside her agonized husband, suffering the same excruciating pain.

It was only a few minutes before a nurse wrapped Ty in a white knitted blanket and let me hold him. His body felt so empty. But I cradled him close to my chest and he still felt like my baby. I kissed the small

bridge between his eyes as I always did before naps and bedtime. Ty appeared so peaceful and beautiful, like he was sleeping—a little angel in my arms. I rocked him and loved him with Dan crying beside me and holding Ty's chubby hand.

“Taumafai,” I murmured, and Dan began to sing the Samoan hymn “Taumafai”—a song that speaks of persevering when the road becomes tough, of relying on Christ and hoping for the future. If we rely on Him, the lyrics say, we can do all things. “Taumafai” was Dan's favorite song on his mission in New Zealand, and he'd sung it there on days when he needed extra strength. During our five years of marriage, he had sung the song to me from time to time when nothing else could console me. It had always brought us peace in the past, as it did that day in the hospital while we embraced our son.

A peaceful spirit entered the room, reminding us that Ty was with his grandpa Kiefer, who passed away a year and half before, and with Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father. A blanket of strength wrapped around us, confirming in our hearts that Ty was safe and happy, but worried about our grief for him.

We held our baby's body for the next hour, savoring the warmth of his skin before it faded away. Dan and I (and even Ty) received blessings of comfort from my father and one of Dan's good friends. When it was time to let Ty go, Dan and I each held him one more time, unwilling to believe this would be the last time we would carry him in our arms. The ER doctor wanted to speak with us, and we finally left our little Bubs behind

so a kind bereavement specialist could make molds of his hands and feet.

Speaking with the doctor, we were touched by the sorrow in his eyes. Our son's death was not simply a part of his job. The experience of trying to save Ty's life was personal and painful, and the doctor felt deeply for us. He explained that as far as they could tell, our son had passed away from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). He told us what we already knew—that little was known about what causes SIDS.

Harrowed with guilt, I dared to ask the question tearing me apart inside. "Was it because the blanket was over him?" I winced, remembering how I couldn't see Ty—how he was completely covered by it.

The doctor reassured me that a baby blanket is much too lightweight to suffocate an infant of Ty's size and ability, despite the precautions given to new parents. Dan also reminded me that Ty was a strong boy who could lift his head and roll over both ways. The doctor explained that there seems to be a biological and chemical problem in the brain of SIDS babies that impedes their respiratory system. I felt some momentary relief by this news, as did my husband, but the guilt would still plague us in future days.

Dan and I returned to my dad's condo—a home we had lived in during the first four years of marriage. It felt safe. It felt like the only place we could go. We never wanted to step foot into our own apartment again.

Dan and I walked around the neighborhood before we entered the condo. Hand in hand we tried to comprehend

how our lives had changed in what seemed an instant. More importantly, we discussed what we were going to do about it. Dan held me in front of him and asked me, with urgency in his voice, to make a promise with him—that we would always be there for each other and rely on one another, that we would include God in our struggle to heal and never turn our backs on Him.

Through our embrace, we began the crucial first step of our grief. We reinforced a solid union between husband and wife and God, securing a foundation that would bring us closer, despite the precious life we once knew lying in ruins before us.

A day at a time, a week at a time, we hoped and prayed we would survive this.