

The First Time I Ran Away

Category: Loss

written by Lantum Lydia | July 28, 2025

The day began like any other in my OB-GYN rotation. A few hours before rounds, I approached a patient who'd just returned from an emergency Cesarean section. I began asking routine questions, until my senior gently nudged me. "Be careful what you ask," he whispered. "She doesn't know her baby died in utero."

I froze. For a moment, I just stood there, flipping through my notes, trying to find the right words. As a fourth-year medical student, this was new territory, and I didn't know how to proceed. Eventually, I tiptoed through her history. When I asked if her baby had cried, she said no. She explained he had been taken shortly after delivery, but she didn't know what happened next.

I thought I'd completed the exam without causing any distress. But just as I turned to leave, she stopped me. "Have you seen my baby? I haven't seen him since he was born. Do you know if he's alright?"

There was fear in her voice—panic, even. Her eyes shimmered with unshed tears. She was searching mine for a sign, a reason to be hopeful.

I stared back, completely blank. I couldn't think. Finally, I said the only thing I could: "I'll find out."

After that, our interactions were brief.

A few days later, I arrived to find her bed empty. She had been sent for counseling. When she returned, her eyes were red and puffy. She stared straight ahead, not noticing anyone. I saw a woman who was heartbroken. Angry. Crushed.

I wanted to go to her. To sit beside her. To let her vent, cry. To make her feel less alone. But I didn't. I didn't know how.

Weeks later, during my surgical rotation, I saw her again. She recognized me instantly. Her face lit up. She introduced me to her family, telling them I had cared for her after her Cesarean.

In that moment, something in me softened. Some of the guilt I had carried quietly lifted.

In the time between, I had wrestled with frustration—at myself, at life. There's no manual for the emotional decisions in clinical care. As students, we're often caught in between—unsure of what we're allowed to say, unsure of how to hold pain we didn't cause but still feel.

She taught me one of the most important lessons of my training: That it matters if I show up. That it matters if I listen. That even when I don't have answers, if I stay and remain present, I can still help someone feel

heard.

Lantum Lydia
Bafoussam, Cameroon