

## Shoe Shopping

by Karen McIntyre

A few days after a miscarriage, a husband will often decide to take his wife out somewhere. The mall is a safe bet. There's no weather in there, and they can walk around and just look at things. At first when he suggests it, the wife just stares at him, but then when he backs away she says yes, it's probably a good idea to get out of the house.

As a surprise, the husband drives past the exit for the local mall and heads to the better one, the Galleria with a Nordstrom's and five different shoe stores. The husband knows women love shoes, and this way she can have fun trying things on and not have to take her clothes off. When they get there he is glad because the mall really is nice. There's a skylight and trees in pots, and the people they pass seem normal. It's not a crazy thing to do, to go shopping on a Wednesday afternoon. Other people are there, and the husband and his wife seem just like them.

The first shoe store they see has a high fashion look. It's pounding with house music but empty, like a brightly lit nightclub nobody wants to go to. Still, they're in front of it, and it seems wrong somehow to not walk in when the salesgirl has already

smiled at them. The shoes also seem odd to the husband; he's hoping that's because he doesn't know anything about fashion. Every shoe is either too pointy or so aggressively chunky it looks like a remedy for clubfoot. The wife picks up a shoe and looks at the price tag underneath, then puts it down again. Don't worry, he wants to say, whatever it costs, I'll buy it for you. But she doesn't seem to like anything. She just keeps picking up shoes and putting them down until the salesgirl comes over, wearing the clubfoot shoes. It's an encouraging sign. The girl smiles again and they start talking about heel heights and platforms and something called a sling-back. The girl suggests several pairs that might work for the wife's "look," though she's wearing the same sweatpants and button-down she wore yesterday, which isn't how she usually looks. The girl heads off to the stockroom, hips twitching to the music. The wife sits on a low pink leather bench and slowly removes one sneaker.

At some point, another man has entered the store. The husband turns to commiserate with him in a sitcom way, then sees the other guy pointing out shoes for his pretty blond girlfriend to try on. This is something that would never have occurred to the husband. What kind of husband can't choose the right shoes for his wife? This bothers him until he reminds himself, he does 90 percent of the grocery shopping and he's very good about the dishes; nobody's perfect. A man can't be expected to know everything.

The wife tries on a pair of the pointy shoes and walks up and down the purple carpet. The shoes don't look comfortable. Then again, that might not be why she's walking that way, so he doesn't say anything. Soon the floor is littered with empty boxes and black heels pointing in all different directions. The husband looks for the salesgirl but she is no help, she's standing next to the wall texting. He kneels on the

floor to put the shoes back in the boxes. He really can't tell them apart so he puts them together as best he can and stacks the boxes on the pink bench for the girl to take back to the stockroom. It is all right. They are just cardboard boxes. They are not coffins. It is just a shoe store, and they are just a married couple out on a Wednesday afternoon.

The wife shows her husband the pointy black shoes she likes. It is a little thing, he knows. Still, it's something. His wife stands next to him, and he puts his hand on her arm. She lets him, then leans sideways and just for a moment their faces touch. The husband carries the box to the cash register and lays his bright blue credit card on top. On the credit card, in the small silvery square, the dove raises its wing to the light.