

Car Accident

I was driving into a parking lot in the mall, and just as I drove into one of the vacant parking spots, I saw to my left a car drive over the barrier onto the street.

"Am I witnessing a homicide?" I wondered as I saw the car driving toward a man. But thank heaven he saw the car and escaped uncertain fate in the nick of time. The car continued forward until it was stopped by a lamp post. Realizing this was a car that had lost control, the man and I ran to the car, its horn still sounding. To our surprise, there in shock sat an older woman.

Me: You'll be fine. Don't move.

Man: Look. Her leg is broken under the gas pedal.

Blood was streaming from her arm, and her chest was red with shades of blue starting to surface. The man was using his cell phone to call 911, but it wasn't working, so I called from my phone.

Me: Hello. There's an old lady here at the mall on Kendall Drive. We're at the Dadeland Mall at the entrance. You've got to come fast. She's hurt pretty bad. Her leg is broken, and she's grabbing her chest.

Dispatcher: Okay. They'll be there in a few minutes. Just hold on.

"God, she barely hit the post," I kept thinking. Only a few months ago I had totaled a car and walked away without a scratch. My God, how fragile life is. This could have been me, maybe worse.

I ended the call, and as I did, the woman started asking for something.

Woman: Dolor, dolor. Necesito telefono. (Pain, pain. I need a phone.) Daughter.

Me: Don't move. (whispering) Our Father, who art in heaven ...

I was unsure of the extent of her injuries. Man. She wanted us to call her daughter. I grabbed for my phone but wasn't sure if we should call. What if her daughter saw her like this. What good would it do? They would both be in pain. But what if this woman dies and doesn't get a chance to call her daughter and to say that she loves her? I remembered my mother and the time she had a terrible accident that resulted in a stroke. I remembered the helplessness I felt and that there was nothing I could do except for wait to see what happened. I thought of the daughter's feelings; I looked at the man. It a tough call. Should we let the daughter see her like this? I don't know.

Woman: Por favor, m'ijita. (Please, my little one.)

Man (frustrated at my indecision): I'm calling.

The woman told him the number, and I continued to chant, whispering Our Father, praying that this woman could get through this with as little pain as possible, thinking all the while of her daughter. I held her arms because she was wanting to move from the pain.

Don't move. Don't move. They're coming. She held on, only talking about her daughter.

I heard the ambulance in the background.

me: they're here.

Once they arrived, the paramedics asked what the situation was.

Me: Her right leg is broken under the pedal.

I told the policewoman standing to the side that the purse was next to the driver's seat. The woman is worried that someone may take it.

I stood there only long enough to hold the gauze for the paramedic to bandage up the arm.

The woman wants someone to call her daughter. I don't speak Spanish. I thought oh so many things. Why didn't I dial the number for her? Would she have been able to speak? Would she have become more frantic? What should I have done?

They put a brace around her neck, and I moved out of the way. I walked to my car, only to close my car door and walk into the mall. There was nothing for me to do. I bought what I had to get, then walked out to the accident. "Is she going to be okay?" I asked the policeman standing next to his car. She was soon whisked away. I stood there feeling helpless and scared of my decision not to call the woman's daughter.

Police: And who are you?

Me: I'm the one who made the 911 call.

He looked down at a sheet of paper he had in his hands. And what's your name? Christine.

He shook his head and said, "She'll be all right."

I then walked to my car to sit down waiting for my company to arrive, and as I sat there I thought of my mother and her accident. Did she want to talk to me when she had her accident? Did she love me?

I dialed her number after three years of no communication. I heard the answering machine, and then said what I was really feeling.

Me: Hi. This is Christine in Miami. I just wanted to let you know that I just witnessed an accident, and I thought about you. I know things are bad between us, but I just want to say that I love you and I wish you a nice holiday season.

Moments later, the woman's daughter arrived at the accident scene. She was a heavy woman in a big white stretch car. She got out and looked at the damage to her mother's car.

She then ran to the officer. I could see the anxiety in her face. After only a brief collaboration between the two, she took off.

I sat there thinking and just thinking of all that had transpired in those brief moments. And how only a few moments had changed my thinking and what I know to be important.

Money and things of that nature can be taken away, all that is important is those we affect and love, and the good we have left behind.

All she wanted was to talk to her daughter, even under excruciating pain, all she could think about was her daughter.

What would I think was important if my death were a moment away?