

Featherweight

by Anita Dennis

She startled, as she had been doing for two weeks, when the phone rang. The sound ripped through the kitchen, stirring the dust motes on that particularly sunny afternoon. It was her sister's voice on the other end. The words didn't matter. She knew it all in the gasp she heard the moment she said, "Hello?"

"Lynn?" It was a breathless question, even though her sister had dialed the number, knew who and why she was calling. She heard her sister's shaggy, shallow breathing through the wire, and the history of sobs behind it, and she knew, she knew. The wait was over.

"What, what, did they find him?" Her heart began to race. She knew. The tide had finally washed him up.

"Yes, yes," her sister sobbed, and she saw her sister sitting alone, red eyed, in her cool, shadowy living room. She desperately wanted to reach out her arms, hold her sister up so she could say the words. "On the roof," her sister said, the words spilling out now, a dam broken. "He hanged himself. The manager found him."

As the torrent hit her, she felt her body slipping, sinking, and suddenly she didn't know where the floor was in relation to her feet. She reached for the counter with her free hand, trying to stabilize herself, and she closed her eyes to shut out the rushing sound coming at her from all sides. Through it, her sister's voice transmitted like a beacon.

"Lynn," her sister said, more deliberately this time, calmer after delivering the blow, reeling her to safety. But no. Her sister's voice dropped and she spoke more slowly, forcing the words out. "He was hanging there for two weeks. Two weeks."

Her knees buckled and she felt herself going down, gliding endlessly, timelessly, while her stomach lurched up, spinning sickeningly in the way she'd imagined, for the last two weeks, how her brother must have felt when he stepped off the bridge. She had been sure he'd jumped off the bridge, walked into nothing, transcending his demons. She'd been watching an instant replay of it in her mind, awake and asleep, since he'd gone missing.

But he hadn't jumped. He'd taken his necktie, roped a noose around a light fixture, and lifted his feet in the quiet early morning of a dusty back stairwell. Still, gravity had done the job, the weight of his own life used to end it. And she wondered if, at the moment he raised his feet off the ground, he felt as light as she did as her body landed on the smooth, hardwood floor.

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