

On the Roof

by Deb Oestreicher

Marie was on the roof. The deck, with its cool concrete pavers and faded cedar Adirondack chairs, was one of the reasons she and Harold had bought their condo in this building. The only ugly part of the roof was the chain-link fence along its edge; soon after they moved in they'd complained about it to the condo board and were told it was necessary to prevent the neighbors' idiot children from flying off into the expressway below.

Marie stepped close to the fence and worked the toe of her shoe into one of the links. Nobody said anything about jumpers.

Harold would think it was fine, Marie guessed. Harold thought everything was fine. Get a good job? Fine. Lose the job? Don't worry, it's still fine. Let's make dinner. Want to have a baby? Fine. Can't have a baby? Also fine. Let's go to the zoo. Nothing fazed Harold.

He would marry again, she knew. It wouldn't take five years; it wouldn't take two. Harold would fall in love with the next woman who opened her eyes wide at him, who laughed at one of his jokes or cracked one of her own. He wasn't built to be solo; he was built to work with what he got.

She remembered how he'd handled his mother's meltdown when his father died several years ago. Harold's mother had been out of her mind with grief and rage, saying terrible things, unforgivable things.

After what seemed like hours of just standing there, listening, Harold put his arms around her and told her he loved her. That they all loved her. Everything would be fine. As Marie watched Harold with his mother, watched the heaving of her shoulders lessen, watched her arms, which had been crossed over her chest, unfold to embrace her son, Marie suddenly saw how he was *herding* her.

This was so opposite what Marie would have done—she was ready to yell right back at Harold's mother, to swear never to see her again, to storm out, to fly home—that she felt her jaw slacken as she watched her husband, amazed that he could surprise her so. And sure she didn't deserve that surprise.

