

Landing

by Nonnie Augustine

Charlotte has been there for a few weeks now and now understands that she is not there to be taken care of, but to take care. She's witnessed her mother's terror on the day of the hurricane, and she demanded for the first time in her life that her mother do something her mother did not want to do. Charlotte found the bottle of Xanax, ignored since being filled, in her mother's medicine cabinet, heated milk, filled a mug, and insisted that her mother take a pill and there must have been something new in Charlotte's voice, or enough fear in Dory's worn out heart, because Dory took the pill and went to sleep. Hurricane Dennis blustered and Dory slept through the worst of the blustering. Tree branches broke and crashed into screens, the sandy ground became too soaked to take the rain and so lawns became ponds, roads little rivers, the forces in the roaring air tried to humble the Royal Palms but they fought bravely, bent fantastically but stayed rooted, the windows threatened to give in, but held firm after all, the brick walls of the house laughed it all off, and Dory slept. Charlotte understood her new role that Tuesday in June. She had been all wrong about why she was in this stupid southern city away from her friends, their coffees, shopping trips, gossip and heartfelt talk, her mendacious, moving-on husband, her blue-eyed cardiologist who she dreamed about and saw as often as remotely reasonable, and her tiny house and its three acres of flower beds, its meadow, ancient trees, visiting deer, and birds taking baths out in front of the bow window. She understands now that she is here to comfort, not to be comforted. She is here in this haven of Christian Rights to make sure that hospice has its paperwork, that the home health nurses come on their appointed days, that she gives the right medications at the right times and that the nurses know when to refill them. Dory's kitchen is Charlotte's domain now and she's taken it in and accepted that her mother is never going to prepare meals for the family again. She makes sure that her mother, losing weight by the day, has whatever she feels like eating, even if it is

cheesecake, chocolates, bologna sandwiches, or bowls of Cheerios for supper because the doctor told Charlotte that diet was no longer the issue, that congestive heart failure as advanced as her mother's wasn't alleviated by Omega 3s, fresh fruit and veg and to give Dory what she thought she might eat and that she was not always going to eat the things she asked for, but to try not to worry about all that. Charlotte's father and brothers are there, too, but they are men and Dory, even when lucidity is such a fleeting thing, sticks to her modest ways and won't let them help much, hardly lets them into her bedroom. Before Charlotte came running south for shelter during the year of separation the stupid state of Maryland required before granting a divorce, her father and brothers hadn't known about Dory's secret dying, because Dory refused to see doctors, take her pills, or finally, even talk to them. So, they, thinking Dory was just being Dory, though without all the talking, let her be. But, after the day of the hurricane and the day of Dory taking the pill from her daughter because of the new thing in her daughter's voice, mother let daughter nurse her, let her take charge, listened to her for once in her life. Charlotte sits in the blue leather recliner in her mother's bedroom while her mother sleeps, her brothers work, her father reads, and Charlotte, a small white dog (who joined her on her flight from the meadow, the deer and the stress of living with mendacity) sleeping on her lap, is comforted.

