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Class of 2018

“Untethered”

Genre: Fiction

Untethered

We had been happy before my wife decided to get depressed. That was about a year ago. Emmaline and I, we'd been pretty close. I mean, we'd witnessed someone die while skydiving. We had gotten to the place ungodly early (she always liked being early) and we decided to watch the previous jumpers in the distance. There was one that was falling much faster than the others, like he was doing tricks or something. Then there was the sound of an impact, and we thought it couldn't be. My wife and I went into the building and they told us there'd been a terrible accident and that we couldn't skydive today. That's a rare thing to experience together. What were the odds? I looked them up after we got back and it was 1 in 100,000. And what were the odds that we would be the ones to see it? A miracle. I took my wife to Olive Garden instead for our five-year anniversary. She cried a bit that night, but I wasn't broken up about it. I didn't even know the person and it was probably his own fault.

But I thought of the skydiving incident when the whole thing started. It started with Mike. He worked in Procurement and I tried to avoid him most days, but he was persistent in talking to me that Tuesday. He told me that his granddad had floated off into the sky. Inexplicable, is what he said. Bullshit, is what I said. And I thought Mike's brain was made of gas. But after the neighbor's kid drifted off the next day while playing soccer, we decided to buy a set of weights, just to be safe. Well, I decided to. It was a great idea. I figured that if I carried one around everywhere, it would stop me from floating off. I bought them before they sold out, like water and bread before a tropical storm. When I told my wife about Mike's granddad and the kid next door and the weights, she didn't care at all.

“Hey, at least we know they’re going to heaven,” she said. She had yoga pants on and her dark hair was in a messy bun.

“Just take the ten pound one,” I said.

She pretended like it was too heavy and then left the house without the weight. I heard her car start and I knew she was going to Target. Emmaline didn’t like watching movies with me or having sex anymore, but she still liked grocery shopping. Since she went to the store everyday, we had enough food for a short apocalypse, though not all of it was edible. But I humored her.

I think my wife might have cared about the situation if we had kids. But we didn’t. She said she wasn’t ready yet. I was patient, but the clock was ticking. I wanted one girl and two boys, and one of the boys would be named after me because my name was a good one. But maybe waiting until this whole thing blew over would be safer. The neighbor’s kid had floated off, even though he had been a bit porky.

I got a drink and turned on the TV. Like I thought, our town was on the news. Maybe they would interview Mike. Or the neighbor. If they interviewed the neighbor, our house might be seen in the background. But right now, the camera was on a physicist who said that gravity was oscillating and soon everything on earth would drift irresistibly into space. Physicists always looked like physicists with their crazy hair, light-wash jeans, and gesturing hands. I liked that. My theory was that people look like who they are on the inside. The anchors joked about UFOs kidnapping people for experiments. Then, it cut to the local pastor who said it was the Rapture. While the pastor was talking about the collective sins of the town, I had an idea, another brilliant one. A strong rope could keep a person tethered to the planet. And it would be less heavy than the weights. I hadn’t

exercised much since I got married, and carrying the medium weight from the set made me feel a bit like that Greek guy who was doomed to hold up the sky. I would ask Emmaline to get a rope on her next Target run.

I was pouring myself another drink when she returned. She had two bags of veggie fries, grapefruit juice, three cartoons of eggs, and cat litter. We didn't have a cat, but Emmaline was always trying to convince me.

"We're not getting a cat," I said.

Emmaline ignored that. "My lungs feel like they're getting too big," she said. "It's been like that since this morning."

"You should drink more milk," I said. "Eat more. Maybe exercise." She was pale like a hermit crab without its shell, but of course she was. She spent almost all her time in the house. I was trying to be helpful, but she looked at me with annoyance. And I'm not proud of what I said next, but after a whole year, my wife needed a push. Maybe she would finally get out of the dumps and be herself again. Maybe we could go on walks together. Maybe we could have a baby and name it Robert Allen Jr.

Instead, she knocked over my drink and left the kitchen without putting up the groceries. I practiced counting to ten, like someone had taught me to do. But I cheated and just counted to five. Ten seconds is a long time when you're stewing. I put the unbroken glass in the sink. Emmaline hadn't done dishes in a few days and I thought about making a chore chart, since that would be fair. Then I saw something move past the window. My wife.

Emmaline was floating away, higher than the roof now, her face overexposed by sunlight so I couldn't really see it. I felt like a kid who had just lost his new red balloon. I

know it seems bad to compare losing my wife to a flyaway balloon, but that's the way it was. It was like everything I should feel had disappeared into the atmosphere with her.