

The Rescuer

I felt so used up, drained of all emotions and energy. Sometimes my skin felt taut across my face and my red-rimmed eyes felt as if they would pop out of their sockets. Once again, I lay in bed fully awake, unable to sleep. I just lay there . . . going through a constant agony of thoughts. My hair was damp with sweat and the sheets felt wet. Even with air-conditioning I could tell it was going to be another hot day. Why wouldn't it be? It was the middle of August in Texas and even at night, the ground seemed to be simmering in the intense heat.

I sat up and turned on the lamp on the bedside table. I looked at the digital clock. Ten minutes until 5. It was going to be light outside before long and I had slept maybe one hour since I lay down at midnight. I slowly swung my feet onto the floor and using my arms, lifted myself out of bed.

I went into the bathroom and ran cold water in the basin, wet a washcloth, and put it against my face. The cold water felt good. I stood staring into the mirror. When I looked at myself, I was always surprised to see that that I was still young. I felt so old. My light tan skin showed the splotches from old acne scars that I was still plagued with (even at my age) and the blotches that come from not getting enough sleep.

But I would not have to worry about not getting enough sleep any longer. I had made my resolve.

By five-thirty I sat alone in the kitchen I had once been so proud of. It was a little early for breakfast but I had not eaten the evening before. I was missing a lot of meals lately. Pretty soon it would not matter that I seldom felt hungry. But for now, I poured myself a bowl of cereal. I could hear the cereal crackle as the milk was poured into the bowl.

My marriage to David had been stormy for the last few years, but beginning last summer, things had gotten progressively worse. David had always put in long hours but in June he started coming home later and later, sometimes arriving at as late 9 or 10. There were even a few evenings when he did not get in until after midnight. I knew he had not been working and he knew that I knew.

He did not try to convince me that he was working during all those supposed evenings at the office. He would admit to stopping off for a cocktail on occasion and his earnings did not support the idea of increased working hours. Fool that I was, they say that the wife is always the last to know. I knew our marriage was having difficulties but I never dreamed there was another woman until just a few months ago.

I decided that I needed bacon and eggs. The smell of the bacon wafted up into my nostrils as it sizzled in the pan. The splattering grease stung my hands as I tried to turn the bacon to brown it on both sides. While the bacon was cooking, I took two eggs out of the refrigerator and two slices of bread from the bread box. I methodically scrambled the eggs and toasted the slices of bread in the toaster.

At last I had my breakfast prepared. I placed the plates on the table and sat down. I took bacon, eggs, and toast and placed some of each on my plate. I lowered my eyes to the plate that sat before me on the kitchen table. I hardly touched the food.

I arose from the table, scrapped my plate into the sink, and started the garbage disposal. Taking my unfinished glass of orange juice with me, I walked from the kitchen, turning out the light as I went.

I went into the bathroom and stared at myself in the mirror. Suddenly the tears started to roll down my face. I cried with such intensity that I felt my organs would be torn loose from my insides. The sounds that came from my mouth seemed not to originate in my body, but in the corners of my skull. It seemed that I would never be able to stop.

Later, I lay in my bed, dazed and un-dreaming, caught in a kind of unfocused thought. I felt so alone. The loneliness was devastating. The thought of it all being over, calmed me somewhat.

I rationalized my intentions. It could not be done with the children in the house so I arranged for David to take them for the weekend.

I had even thought of how I might do it. Pills would be slower but would not have the mess of having to clean up blood and gore like it would if I decided to slit my wrists. But I rejected this method as well. From what I had seen on crime shows on TV pills were not a sure fire method of ending a life. What if I did not take enough and I survived? I could be brain damaged and then someone would have to take care of me for the rest of my life - with me trapped inside my body for many years to come to think about what I had done.

No, it had to be something that was sure to get the job done right the first time. I had been thinking about this off and on for three months. Now I was sunk in the mires of a depressive episode that would not let go. I was so weary of the tears and the loneliness and the overwhelming sadness. In happier times I had wondered how anyone would allow themselves to wind up in a point where not going on was preferable to the loneliness that stretched ahead. And then an opening came my way.

My friend Gwen had been bugging me to spend a weekend with her and her family at their country place in East Texas where there was swimming and canoeing in their large pond. I pondered this in my mind. I had visited at their farm before and I recall the children playing around in a small boat that they kept moored to the dock there. Maybe I could arrange to slip over the edge of the boat. I'm not a very strong swimmer so it should be quick and hopefully merciful. Yes. That would be it. It would be simple and everyone would think it was an accident. No guilt for any of those left behind.

I thought about it all week. I called Gwen and asked her when they would be going to their farm again and could I go with them or meet them there. I explained that I needed a break from my normal weekend routine. Gwen was more than happy to have me come with them and her family the following weekend.

I started to formulate my plans. I went shopping and purchased a new swimming suit. I had lost so much weight since David and I broke up that my old one was way too large. I found myself getting both a manicure and a pedicure at what would be my last salon visit. "Why?" I asked myself. I put the question from my mind.

Finally the day came to carry out my plan. David picked up the boys around 8 and I was in the car headed to the farm and its pond by 9. I had created a playlist of my favorite songs to play that day. I plugged my iPhone into its car adapter. My favorite song was playing – Randy Crawford's "Everything Must Change. Nothing stays the same. " How true those words were.

I spent a part of my last evening writing the story of my life. I dabbled in writing for many years and parts of the story had already been written in the form of short stories that, although bore the names of others, was often about myself.

I wanted to put down on paper my feelings during these last few weeks but I could not bear to write a suicide note. That would have been so final. With a story about myself, I was free to change my mind. So I just wrote what was in my heart disguised as just another short story – one among the many that I have written during my lifetime.

By ten that morning, I was turning onto the road that lead to Gwen's farm. Shortly thereafter I was being greeted by Gwen, her husband Greg, and their three children. Greg's mother and father were also there at the farm this weekend – Mr. and Mrs. Adams. I had met them before. They were nice. Mr. Adams loved to tell what I called "old man jokes". It would be some weekend.

The day was hot - hot enough for swimming and boating. On any other day, I would have expected to have an excellent time. The men were going to barbecue later in the afternoon and they reminded everyone to save some appetite for grilled steaks and burgers. We assured them that we would.

That afternoon, when the sun was at its hottest, we decided to go swimming. I went into the house to change into my bathing suit. I looked at myself in the mirror one long last time. I saw in my reflection, eyes that were puffy but not swollen, blotches hidden under makeup, a nose that was not red for a change. I looked almost normal again. But seeing my almost normal face did not take away from my resolve. I picked up my bag and walked down to the pond. There waiting by the water was the boat I had remembered.

Calling to Gwen that I was going for a little boat ride, I stepped into the boat and launched myself into the middle of the pond with the oar. I rowed for a while. The pond wasn't very large so I was able to touch opposite banks more than once. Finally, I stopped rowing right in the middle of the pond. I took the oars out of the water and laid them across the boat then I gently let myself over the

side. The water was warm – just as it should be in the middle of a hot August day. Gingerly, I started swimming.

Then, I allowed myself to slip below the water. The water beneath the surface was not warm and pleasant – it was cold and clammy. I touched the bottom and thinking of the ickyness down below, I shot myself to the surface and began to tread water.

I swam around some more, then once again I took a deep breath and slipped below the surface. This time I resolved not to come up again. That is until I finally had to have a breath of air. I opened my mouth instinctively to inhale while underwater and water rushed into my mouth. My nostrils burned. Before I knew it I was shooting to the surface of the water again. This time I came up coughing and sputtering and flailing my arms about. Before you could say “Cock Robin”, three people dove in the pond to my rescue.

The one who got his arm around my body first was Tony. I did not know his last name but I had seen him at Gwen and Greg’s on more than one occasion. He swam sideways with his arm across my chest and around my waist. When he got close to the shore the other two men who dove in to help me, pulled me choking and sputtering from the water. They flopped me over like a fish and started CPR on me.

Finally water no longer came from my mouth. My eyes opened slowly. I coughed again. “What happened?”, I ventured timidly, knowing full well exactly what had happened. I deliberately let myself go down for the second and what I hoped was the last time.

The person who first spotted me was Tony, Gwen’s cousin who had just arrived. If he had not happened to be gazing out into the pond, he never would have seen me as I let myself go under that last

time and might not have noticed as I flailed about, trying to get a breath of air but failing to, because of the water already in my lungs.

I laid on the bank of the pond until someone finally helped me to stand. Someone else wrapped a towel around me. I alternated between feeling foolish, feeling disappointed that my plan did not worked, and relief that it had not. I felt light-headed and dizzy and wanted to vomit. My legs were weak and shaky. I asked to sit down. Someone helped me to a lawn chair and helped me to prop my feet up on another. Still someone else brought a robe and wrapped it around me, for in spite of the heat from the August sun, I was shivering.

“What happened?” someone asked.

“Did you fall out of the boat?” someone else asked.

“Were you trying to swim back to shore?” I heard Gwen ask. “But you don’t swim that well, CeCe. I should never have let you go out in that boat alone.” Gwen threw her arms around my neck and kissed me on the cheek. “What was I thinking?” she asked, tears streaming down her face.

Mr. Adams put a drink in my hands. It tasted like apple cider but stronger. It felt good as it went down. I had finally stopped coughing.

“Would you like to lie down dear?” Mrs. Adams asked solicitously.

Everyone was being so kind to me. If they only knew how I had planned on wrecking their beautiful day. What *was* I thinking? How could I do that to all these lovely people, especially to Gwen, who had been my friend for many years?

Tony volunteered to drive me home, and someone else drove my car. On the way, we did not say very much to each other. Finally, he cleared his throat. “I know what you did,” was all he said.

I burst into tears. Finally I said, "Was it that obvious?"

"No. But I'm a trained lifeguard and I was watching everyone in the water. I knew you were in trouble the moment I spotted you out there in the middle of the pond. Everyone else was near the shore. One thing, though. If you have been so low and depressed that you've considered suicide, you need help. Are you seeing someone?"

"Only a marriage counselor," I replied.

"Well," he began. "I've been where you are and you need professional help from someone who knows what they're doing. I've been seeing Dr. Charles Lett for about six months and he has really helped me."

"You?" I asked incredulously. "You don't look or act like you're depressed".

"That's because I got help and Dr. Lett has me on anti-depressants. My problems have not gone away. I just look at them differently now. I know that no matter what happens, I can cope. Maybe he can help you, too. If you like, I can give you his number."

"Thanks," I said. "I think I do need to see someone. To think I would leave my boys."

I took Tony up on his suggestion. I called Dr. Lett but his patient list was full so he referred me to another therapist – Dr. Angie Thompson.

I had hit it off with Dr. Thompson right away. I did not feel that she was judgmental or critical of my inability to get on with my life since my breakup with David.

I had been seeing Dr. Thompson for about six months when I ran into Tony one Friday night at RJ's by the Lake. This was the first time I had felt up to going out in a very long time. I wasn't drinking

though because of my meds, so I was enjoying a nice spritzer when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

“Hi. I see you’re feeling better,” he said.

I smiled. “How can you tell?” I wanted to know.

“Oh, happiness, just like depression, shows in everything you do or say. Tonight you’re enjoying the music and the lights and just being alive. It shows. Here, put that drink down and come dance with me.”

We danced to several songs and finally we went back to my table. “Bye,” said Tony. “I’ve got to get home early. I have a date tomorrow with a little 7 year old – my daughter. Her mom moved back to Dallas and I get her every weekend now. Maybe we could get the kids together for a play date sometime.” We traded numbers and promised each other to call.

He walked away. I thought of him as my rescuer – not from my loneliness. I was learning day by day to live with it and I had been cautioned by Dr. Thompson to not get involved in any romances at this vulnerable time of my life.

But it *was* Tony who had pulled me from the water that day and who had convinced me that I needed professional help and for that I would always think of him as a friend and yes, my rescuer.