

September Morning

by Brent Robison

Helen's mind is not on business. It's on a pinpoint, a potential, a something so microscopic it's more a nothing. In her center, it hums.

Every morning there is this settling in, the transition from the crush and chaos of the street, subway, elevator, to the solitude of her office. The solitude that will last a precious three minutes before it gives way to another crush: the focus of work, the pressure of duty. She punches the power buttons: monitor then computer. She toes off her sneakers, still tied, and slides them with a nyloned foot under the desk. She's not yet ready to put on the heels, the "torture-pedics" she calls them, so she stands in stocking feet looking out the window, a Starbucks cup still in her hand. Decaf, because it's better for the ovaries.

She had woken before the alarm, in the still black time, and climbed out of bed without waking Daniel. His schedule was out of sync with hers; a dark gulf had opened between them. Daniel was deep in the final act of the novel he'd taken a year off to write, and often stared blankly into space, his lips moving slightly. Sometimes in conversation with her, mid-sentence, his eyes would glaze, his focus wander. Only rarely could she get him to let her in, and then he'd turn suddenly manic and pace the room, arms waving, acting out scenes in dialogue, changing voices—a villainous basso profundo, a girlish falsetto—and if it was a good day they would simultaneously realize the absurdity of this picture, and dissolve into laughter. Other times a black silence would descend.

But as his novel had grown, so had an irrational need in her, from somewhere deeper than she'd known before. Even this junior broker job she'd worked so long for, that had finally netted her these actual walls and a window, could fade away, and she could smile to see it go. Sometimes this was alarming, but less and less so.

This morning, in the glow of the night light in the bathroom, she had done her monthly test. She peed on the little plastic strip, on

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the Urine Collection Pad, holding it gingerly by the ergonomic Thumb Grip, then watched for the lines to appear in the Results Window. Yes—today could be Ovulation Day. Normally—the last three months—she would have waited until evening to take the next step, but this morning she felt a vague hormonal insistence that sent her back into the bed, naked, next to Daniel. She caressed him, and then it was as if their bodies took over.

It was quick but good, better than it had been in a very long time. At first, just blind urgent fumbling. Then in the dim light of dawn his eyes opened, clear, and locked to hers. The prodigal ecstasy returned, the inexplicable merging, the goodness that was pain just too sharp and sweet to bear. She melted, lost in him and in all of everything. After they came together and he kissed the tears that ran down to the pillows from the corners of her eyes, she knew that these were the moments of her life that most closely resembled prayer.

Now, she hears the beep and whirl of her computer booting up. She drains the cup and stretches a long yoga stretch. Hand on her chest, she feels the pendant that hangs under her blouse, against her skin; the gift from Daniel last May for their fifth anniversary; the glowing egg shape that she knew was his unspoken way of empowering her inner alchemy with a magic amulet. She's sure, yes, quite sure she feels the tiniest buzz in her belly: excited cells, busily dividing. She takes one more long look out the window at the view she loves: this incredible city spread out below, with her its goddess gazing down with overflowing tenderness from the 93rd floor. And somewhere in that far tiny tangle of roofs that may be Chelsea, her dear Daniel is just waking up, and now sun glimmers on both the big rivers, and the graceful bridges are like toys, and the city seems impossibly silent and peaceful. This is a moment that is almost like flying. And way out there to the north there's a plane approaching, just a bright little dot in the cloudless blue sky.

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