

Unlucky Star

by Jennifer Donnell

“If I ever do... kill myself...” Rosalie began, placing a dirty plate into the soapy water filling the stainless steel sink of her kitchen, moving her head with a twitch to get her dyed brown hair out of her eyes... eyes wrinkled, but not half as much as most women her age.

I smoothed my own wavy blonde hair, my face unmade for the day, having just awoken. My calmness at her revelation was evidence that I'd heard this since the age of ten, the first time she expressed wanting to die. I remember knowing, then, that the mind can be like a prison. I remember being thankful that I seemed to have a key to mine and be mostly free.

“I don't want you, not even for one minute,” she continued, tone empowered, “... to blame yourself. If anything, you're the only one who has ever given a damn...” she thought more, then added, “...besides Jeremy.”

Jeremy is my brother. He travels, for work, and often lives abroad, but always makes time to call her. Sometimes he calls from Africa, other times London or Rome.

“You can't do that, ever.” I retorted strictly, fighting fire with her simmering sadness. I spoke commandingly, taking on the authoritative tone of her parent, trumping genetics. “If you do that, no one will ever recover and you'll make it where Camden is more likely to kill himself. Having a relative do that puts teenagers at risk, especially ones who already struggle. Then it would be your fault he killed himself.”

She snorted, annoyed, then spoke up in philosophical defense, “Suicide is the ultimate act of selfishness, so when someone does it

they don't worry about others, only themselves!" her British accent came out. It had been years since she lived in Britain, but the accent lingered as much as her childhood wounds and abusive first husband.

The conversation began with my trying to reassure her. I reminded her that however she was feeling right now, today, it wouldn't feel like this forever. It was just a hard day for her, a hard moment. I told her I was sorry she was feeling so "down" and booked appointments for her with a therapist and a psychiatrist.

She fought against the thought of either, saying they wouldn't do any good. She fretted about the copay, but when I mentioned that she could go to the hospital for more immediate help, she shrieked and told me to know when to shut up.

"Well, you can't go on like this!" I demanded, "Besides, the therapist has a ton of credentials in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. She helps with mindfulness and stress relief, both of which could help with your sleep.."

"I'm fine." she insisted, "I'm fine now." she insisted, then changed her mind, the alcohol that helped her sleep even a few hours still polluting her system. I could smell it in the air, like fragrance. She walked out of the room saying that she's worse when others are around to listen.

I sat down on the couch and she walked in again, restless in her upset.

It had been years since she was able to sleep properly. That's another jail cell, the inability to sleep. She tried sleeping pills, but most didn't work, left her addicted, and the ones that did began to affect her hearing.

I considered joking that it was better to be, "Deaf and happy, than sleepless and miserable." but this seemed uncouth.

"I only feel like dying because..." and she began to list reasons, a laundry lists of current concerns, some she considered my fault, others financial or personal. "Mostly it's because I'm old now. You don't know what it's like to be old! There's nothing to look forward to!"

She looked glum. Even sad, she was beautiful for her age.

"But that's not true." I told her, honestly, "You felt like this when I was small and..."

"Only when you were a teenager, because YOU kept me up all night from worry when you stayed out late." she interrupted, again blameful.

"No, even when I was ten. We went skiing and..." I remembered her lying in bed, comatose, feeling it was her husband's fault, back then. She used to say she'd been born under an unlucky star.

"Oh, be quiet!" she raged back at the memory, "I don't need to be reminded how I felt 20 years ago."

And she walked outside, into the garden she tends to with immaculate care. The spring flowers were blooming and the pink matched her cardigan. She picked up the rake and moved some fallen leaves, then went to the hose and sprayed the plants clean.

