

14. THE LONG WAY DOWN

She gripped the rope with all her might. She swung out over the edge and tried to hold on. She didn't want to let go. But she could feel that she was losing her grip. Nothing but open air separated her from the long drop. She couldn't hold on. She didn't dare contemplate the fall. The rope was starting to burn her hands as she tried to pull herself back. It was too late.

"Just let go!"

What were they saying to her?

"You need to let go!"

She didn't want to let go. She didn't want to fall. But she couldn't help it.

She was telling herself, "There is nothing that I can do about it."

She wouldn't let go. She just was falling. Falling and falling. She screamed. This was not a dream. She had gone through this in her dreams. But this was real.

She screamed some more. She screamed with all her life.

"Oh, no."

"It's going to be all right!"

She hit the water feet first and went down like lead.

"I don't want it to end like this."

She held her breath as she went down. Further and further down. But then she checked herself. She wouldn't submerge anymore."

"That was scary. I want to do it again."

All the other swimmers gathered around her. It was over eighty degrees. A really warm April day. And the cold water felt so good. It cooled her off.

"I want to try the rope again." Today, it was her game. Sienna was getting good at it. She knew how to swing herself just so far. She wouldn't let go until that last heart-stopping moment. Wow!

Some of Lynette's friends from the hospital had shown up too. It was the perfect sunny day for an outing. They brought some beer along. When they weren't swimming, they were lounging on the rock.

The springs sun kissed her white skin. It piqued the life in her. She smiled from the sheer radiance. She had never felt so one with herself. The cool water was the perfect complement for the heat of the rocks. This was a new Sienna. She was healthy. She was confident. She was alive. She didn't want to think about the shadows. She climbed up the rocks for another dive.

There was nothing that anyone could do to ruin this moment. It was hers now and for ever.

On the way home she thanked Lynette for bringing her along, "You know the best medicine for the doldrums."

"Don't thank me. I didn't make the weather."

"It was the perfect day. Not too hot at all."

They hadn't brought any food with them. The women still felt the beer buzz. They made some hamburgers for themselves. As the evening rolled in, they were both stuffed. They surveyed the dishes.

“We need to take care of these.”

Everything had been quiet for the past few days. Warren had promised results. She was going to head down there the next day.

She was a little worried about sleeping. But she had drunk enough to get ready. She was drowsy as they finished the dishes.

“Lynette, I’m going to turn in. I think I’ll read a bit.”

“I need to work tomorrow. I’m going to watch some TV. Are you sure that you don’t want to join me.”

“I’m already too tired.”

Her fatigue made her weaker than usual. But she was now much stronger over all. She figured that she was ready for a good night sleep. She hated the thought of being up all night long and getting to sleep as the sun came up. Tonight was a great night for sleeping. She opened her window to let in a cool breeze. She could still feel the sun’s warmth on her skin. The breeze was the best reply to the daytime heat.

In the hot sun, she had come into her own. This was who she was. She loved to show off her body in play. But her assailant had made her feel that this was sinful. That she should cover up. There was a puritanical bent to the pursuit. It had forced her to hide herself. This made her seem more desperate. She had ceased nurturing her sensual side. The warmth of the day had invited her again to explore her physical liberation. She welcomed the shedding of clothes. She did this in total innocence; she felt no guilt.

Cordelia had become her executioner. Her assassin had marked her just for this purpose. On this view, one only had to look at her to see her corrupted nature. Her body was her sin. The Deacon Worth prowled the streets of the town with just this motive in mind. He would seek divine wrath against any soul who tried to assert her natural desire.

Since Sienna had felt so frustrated by her surroundings, she turned to the arms of Jack. But he made her feel dirty about their connection. Even in trying to explain himself, he increased those feelings of worthlessness. But those feelings had nothing to do with who Sienna really was. That knowledge made it easier to resist the intent of her attacker. He might restrain her physically. But he would have no control over her mind. She wanted to be able to come and go as she pleased.

Her new way of thinking came automatically to her. She had none of the fears that had previously haunted her nights. Her body spoke of this way of being. Every movement, every breath, every sensation, all spoke of the same thing. She was free, free to be herself. She no longer needed to give voice to her feeling. Her body could do it for her. In this way she had overthrown the parasitical forces that had inhabited her soul.

She woke up with a feeling of total relaxation. She had been completely invigorated by her sleep. Lynette was already at work. Sienna made herself a hearty breakfast. She ate with a renewed spirit.

Today, she looked around her at her surroundings. The hills and far off mountains seemed to call her. She went for a long walk. She gave into this calling. The sun was still warm like the previous day. It invited her to shed her clothes. She took off her shirt. She had a top underneath. The sun baked her shoulders a golden brown. The tan emphasized the sleek sculpted form of her arms. Her body spoke of her activity. She had been sidelined for months.

But it was not in her nature to sit and watch. She needed to participate. To challenge herself physically with strenuous exercise.

The more that she walked, the more that she felt encouraged. She had never lost this deep memory. Her name was simply a label that she wore. In Cordelia all they could see was this label. She was a sinner. But out here in the sun, she was a newborn. She had to answer for no offense. She could be independent.

When she returned from her trek, it was almost mid-afternoon. A natural fatigue had come over her. But there was no shame in this feeling. It did not demonstrate any weakness on her part. She felt great. A little rest, some food, and she would again be ready to take on the world.

She wanted a shower to wash the sweat off. She let the water run down her body. She came alive in water. It was like the swim of the day before. Her dread had been washed away. She was immaculate.

She towel dried herself and sat on the bed. She touched her left shoulder with her right hand. She passed the hand down along her arm. She was discovering her body for the first time. There was no shame here at all. She was proud. In this pride she could forge her personality. It would bear none of the traits that had made her a victim. She was going turn the tables.

She thought again about Deacon Worth. He standing from a pulpit looking down at her—his condemnation was futile. She had a strength that could not be put asunder by his words. He attempted to decry her vanity. But his words spoke only of his self-righteousness. She would not surrender to him.

After dinner, she decided that she needed to get out of the house. She wanted to celebrate her liberation. She'd go to the Roadhouse and have the time of her life. No one would get in her way.