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Ventricle

by Mari Syrad Grieves

A thin length of red string connects my left ventricle to his. It was difficult to attach, the chamber being slippery and malleable, but I tied it on with a triple knot and now I keep my fingers crossed at all times that it'll hold. Slick with blood, I try to keep a tight grip on the string, using it as a guide while I traverse life's knife edge. It is easier with him, safer. All the time I have hold of the string, I can't fall.

What I didn't consider is that even if the string doesn't break, either heart could without warning. And then, then...

'Keep the knot tight, ventricle to ventricle; hold on to the string; don't let the hearts break,' I repeated under my breath, the rhythm of the mantra keeping time with my rapid breathing. I walked as though I didn't notice the rain and the sharp wind that hurried and hindered others in the street. That isn't why I hurried, it was the words building speed like a steam train; they started slow, but the more coal thrown into the fire, the more momentum they gathered.

We found each other in the dark; witnesses to a crime with more to it that we could ever have imagined. We swore each other to secrecy. We fell in love in the light, and as time went by we forgot about the darkness of the first night, instead our life was the hazy shaded laughter of a sunny garden, or at least that was the snapshot I chose to retain. We are bound by the secrets we share, the knotted string embedded into our organs over time, and as long as the secret remains, neither of us will leave, and the string will not break.

Two years after the dark night and the sunny garden, Daniel asked me to marry him behind the rushing echo of a waterfall. Three years after that, when we had all but forgotten the darkness, Daniel was shot as he got in his car. The doctor said he was killed instantly, his heart had caught the bullet, he didn't feel any pain.

'How do I keep the string tied around a rotting ventricle?' I thought. 'Don't let the hearts break, don't let go of the string, keep the knot tight around the ventricle.'

But the bullet didn't just kill Daniel. About six hours after I left the hospital, a crimson stain began to spread across my shirt; blood seeping slowly from a small hole in my chest. I stared at my bare torso in the bathroom mirror, rocking slightly at the tugging sensation. The red string, pulled slowly by his departure, began to peek out from the bleeding puncture. I tried to push it back in but it only opened the wound wider, the string rushing now, metres of red coiled at my feet, I tried to hold on, but it was too slippery. As the colour drained from my face, the string finally came to an end. It fell lifelessly to the floor and I followed.