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Up, Up, and Away

by Shari R. Fineman

“Here’s what I want you to do.” Roger handed Dana the wooden spool of kite string. “Reel it out about a foot at a time, not too fast. If there’s too much slack it will knot.”

Dana sighed. She rolled her shoulders, first one, then the other, loosening up the way she did in yoga. It would take less time to go along than to argue. How long could it take for him to get the need to fly a kite out of his system? An hour?

The wind was strong, whipping fiercely enough that even the hardcore members of the private beach had relocated to the cocoons of their backyard pools. Dana was relieved. They didn’t know the beach crowd yet and this wasn’t the impression she wanted to make. Sand sprayed against her thighs, her neck, every inch of exposed skin. At least it was exfoliating.

“OK, get ready,” Roger raced with the kite into the wind. Dana watched her husband trip across the sand in the Vuitton beach loafers she’d insisted he buy. The wind blew through his thinning hair and pinkness of his scalp flashed in the sun. His legs were too skinny and something about the way he ran reminded Dana of a duck. She glanced over her shoulder to reassure herself that no one was watching. Fine, Dana thought, so he wanted to fly a kite. Maybe he would get interested in prop planes, too, would take some flying lessons and get a pilot’s license. It would be nice to have a husband who was qualified as a pilot.

Dana felt a sharp tug on the kite string, what she imagined a big fish on a line felt like. She tilted her head up to the sky, shielding her brow with one hand, holding on to the string with the other. There was the kite, high up in the air, climbing higher. And also up there, also climbing, was Roger. Dana’s hand flew to her mouth. She gasped. He waved.

96 Harpur

Dana looked up and down the beach. It was still empty and she was even more relieved that no one would see her husband now that he was on the kite. Then a wave of panic hit as she realized she wasn't sure what to do. She cursed under her breath. Why couldn't Roger be normal, out playing golf or day-trading? She looked up at him. "GET DOWN!!!" she shouted. The wind pushed her words behind her. It drowned out her voice so that even she had trouble hearing it. Dana pulled at the spool and the string as hard as she could, but it wouldn't budge. The kite felt as if it was wedged between two cement blocks. The force was tremendous—as if Roger had managed to steer into some kind of thermal pocket. Dana wondered if the force was enough to yank her up too, if the winds would carry both of them over the sea. And where would they land? On the Long Island Expressway? Staten Island?

Dana dug her feet hard into the sand. She was *not* getting sucked off to some unplanned place by her husband and his kite. Not a chance. She took a deep breath, and held it. A yoga breath. Breathe in. Breathe out.

In the distance she saw a couple walking along the beach, heading in her direction. Behind her, a parking lot of lounge chairs, naked of cushions, was lined up. She unwound enough string to reach the nearest chaise and wove the spool through three chairs. She yanked the string, testing its grasp and when she was as sure as she could be that it would hold, she let go. The anchor worked. Up in the sky, Roger and the kite floated freely.

Dana ran to the water and waved to the approaching couple, feeling like a desperate accident victim on a highway flagging down a speeding vehicle. Though they weren't on a road, and there was no reason not to stop. The couple waved back and ambled over; they were younger than her and Roger, maybe

Shari Fineman

early thirties. The woman wore a wide-brimmed straw hat and a simple linen dress, employing her basic outfit as a canvas to display the intricate gold rings and bracelets she wore on both wrists. It was a look Dana liked, something she might try herself. She made a mental note to ask who the jewelry designer was.

“Morning,” the man said. He had a deep tan and thick white blonde hair. He held up a palm in a wave and his antique Rolex glinted in the sun.

“Morning,” Dana said, and for a moment nothing was wrong. “I’m sure this is going to sound crazy,” she began, and to her surprise her throat closed up and she couldn’t say another word. She pointed up at the sky with one hand. “My husband,” she squeaked.

“Well, would you look at that,” the man stared up into the sky, barely squinting, without shielding his eyes. A sailor, Dana thought. He’s used to the sun.

“Annie, do you see him?”

His wife nodded. “Look at that,” she repeated.

“It just happened, maybe five minutes ago. I let out the string, and then the next thing I knew...” She pointed. It occurred to her that she did not know if Roger had planned to go up or if it had happened accidentally. “I mean it happened out of the blue, right out of nowhere...”

Annie smiled. “Out of the blue,” she repeated.

Dana nodded, dazed. She hadn’t realized her pun.

“We should do something, Don,” Annie said to her husband. He nodded, and took his cell phone from his shirt pocket. It was one of the newer models, with a sleek silver face and mother of pearl buttons. He offered it to Dana. “Do you want to call 911?”

She took the phone.

Dana wondered if Roger was in calling range. His phone

98 Harpur

was in his pocket. "I'd like to try him first," she said, gesturing with her neck to her husband in the sky. "Do I dial a one?"

Don shook his head. "Just area code and number."

Roger answered on the third ring. "Hello?"

"Roger?"

"Dana."

Dana turned slightly away from Annie and Don so they wouldn't hear her and then hissed into the phone, "Roger did you *plan* this?"

"Dana, it's amazing up here. Just amazing!"

The couple on the beach looked at Dana, then looked up into the sky. They looked from Roger to Dana as if they could hear both sides of the phone conversation and were following it the way people watch a tennis match, turning their heads from side to side to the rhythm of the game.

"Roger, you have to come down. Roger, this is *insane!*"

"Not yet. Go get a manicure or something, I'll catch up later."

"Roger!"

She heard the click of the connection cutting off. He had hung up.

Dana turned to the couple and wished she had not stopped them. She was embarrassed by Roger's actions and surprised; in their three years of marriage he had never made a scene.

She held the phone in her palm. "He's decided to stay up for a bit," she explained. She tried to sound calm, approving even.

"Icarus Complex," the man commented. "Read about it last summer. It's not uncommon."

"You should still call 911," Annie said. "You know, they're probably trained in talking people down and all."

Again, Dana looked up. It appeared to be less blustery that high, where the kite and Roger dipped and floated across the sky. She heard a whistling. It was the wind, it had to be,

Shari Fineman

although it did sound a lot like it might be Roger going
“Wheeeeeeeee!”

Seconds later the Coast Guard appeared; they explained that a well-known actor who lived on the beach had called 911 the moment it happened.

“Which actor?” Annie asked.

Dana wondered the same thing. She hoped it was someone with an academy award.

“I’m not at liberty to say, ma’am,” a man from the Coast Guard said. He and his crew had arrived in an all-terrain beach buggy type vehicle, in bathing suits and military looking vests. They carried bright orange medical bags, a rubber raft and walkie-talkies. They looked like something between a S.W.A.T. team and television actors playing lifeguards.

“I bet it was one of the Baldwins,” Annie said and pointed. “Alec has a house somewhere right around here.”

Dana shrugged one shoulder, in hopes of communicating nonchalance and indicating she wasn’t impressed.

The man in charge introduced himself. “I’m Lieutenant Reilly,” he said. He faced Dana and her new acquaintances. “Is anyone here related to the man on the kite?”

Dana tipped her chin up. “Yes, he’s my husband.” A crowd of attractive people, residents of the area, was forming on the beach and Dana had begun to feel proud of the situation. Being the center of attention wasn’t a bad thing when you considered who was paying attention.

Annie held up the cell phone. “He won’t come down,” she said. “We called him.”

Dana shot her a look. He was *her* husband. It was her story. “Well, maybe now he will,” she said to the Coast guard. She punched in Roger’s number and handed over the cell phone. “You try.”

They watched him with the phone in one hand, binoculars

100 Harpur

Up, Up, and Away

in the other. Dana turned to Don. "I really appreciate the use of your phone. Of course you'll have to send me the bill."

He waved her off. "Not a problem. I have free weekends. Call anyone you want."

Reilly had Roger on the line. He introduced himself, then paused. "Sir, is it that you're unable to come down?"

A nod. "I see. Well I'm afraid that's not possible. See, we have a Trailer plane scheduled to occupy the airspace you're in. It's up in fifteen minutes."

Again he paused. Dana strained to hear what Roger was saying but the only sound was the wind.

The Coast Guard continued speaking to Roger. Apparently he was answering a question. "A Trailer is a plane with a banner behind it. Advertising banner." He gave a slight nod of his head. "Uh huh. That's right." He looked at Dana, Annie and Don, and held up a palm as though to say, I've got this under control folks, you can just go on with whatever it is you were doing.

"Sir, I'm afraid we need the airspace. There are a lot of advertising dollars at stake here and if that plane can't run the trailer along the ocean..." He pursed his lips. "Well, it's an ad for a Wet 'N Wild party in Southampton, I believe." He looked over at his partner.

The partner nodded. "That's correct, Lieutenant, Wet 'N Wild in Southampton."

Reilly was still talking to Roger. "Sir, I really don't think that's a good..." he stopped mid-sentence, taking the phone from his ear. Up in the sky Dana saw a flash of silver.

"My God," she exclaimed.

Annie craned her neck. "What? What is that?"

"It's his Nokia," Dana said.

"He said he was going to do that," Lieutenant Reilly com-

Shari Fineman

mented. The group watched as the phone flashed against the horizon, a piece of space confetti.

Don shook his head, his mouth agape in awe of Roger's action. "Those babies are five hundred a pop without the custom headset," he said.

Annie nodded. "That's balls."

Roger had now been in the air three hours and the beach was crowded with emergency personnel. The Trailer plane had been rerouted, Wet 'N Wild in Southampton would attempt to draw the crowd out near the bay instead. "I mean really, who out *here* would go there anyway," Annie had snorted. She gave Dana an approving look. "You just did them an enormous marketing favor."

The problem was that there was another Trailer scheduled to come through. This one, advertising a new series of HBO documentaries, was set to go up in less than two hours.

"We need to be resolved by then," Reilly said. "HBO is not about to compromise their air space."

The kite string was still wound around through the lounge chairs. Yellow tape, the crime scene type, was strung around the chair on all four sides. Up in the sky, Roger swayed in the wind. Dana picked up Reilly's binoculars and studied her husband. He had hooked the kite through his belt and his arms were stretched wide. The binoculars were so strong she could see the smile on his face. "Wow, these are good."

Don chuckled. "Your tax dollars hard at work." He unwrapped a sandwich. He had gone to the farmer's market to get them all something to eat.

Dana studied Roger through the binoculars. He wove in and out of the current, a serene look on his face. Now would be a good time for him to return to the beach, she thought. He had

102 Harpur

made a statement against worthless advertising in the sky, he had taken on the Coast Guard. And, Roger had shown Dana a side she didn't know; or didn't pay attention to. This newly demonstrated assertiveness was sexy and Dana was caught between feeling attracted to her husband and the realization that for most of their relationship that feeling had been absent. She forced the thoughts from her head; she could analyze it all later. Now, she had to focus on the situation at hand.

Dana put down the binoculars and picked up a sandwich. If Roger came down now Dana was sure they'd be regarded as local celebrities

"Mmmm, is this arugula?" Dana asked, her mouth full.

Don nodded. "Poached chicken, arugula, Creole tomatoes and low-fat chipotle mayo. The best."

Behind them, more vehicles were arriving. An ambulance with dune buggy wheels headed their way.

"Wow, I'd like to go four-wheeling in that," Don commented. And then they saw the tank.

"What on Earth is that here for?" Dana felt her heart rate speed up. Now things were going too far. They couldn't possibly be thinking of shooting Roger down, could they? "Why is there a tank here?" She began to pace. The coast guard signaled the ambulance driver, who came over with a serious looking toolbox.

"Ma'am, let me give you something to calm you down."

"I am perfectly calm," Dana said.

The coast guard spoke up. "The tank is just protocol, Ma'am."

Annie tapped the ambulance man's shoulder. "I'm feeling awfully anxious," she said. "Do you have Valium? Or Adavan?"

Dana continued pacing the ground. A new man had shown up and was being briefed by Reilly. He wore a very starched

Shari Fineman

shirt with striped patches on the sleeves and epaulets. His haircut was definitely military. Dana approached him with her head high and her shoulders back. She imagined herself with Roger at a cocktail party several weeks from now, relaying the fantastic details to a captivated audience, as they explained how they had stood up to the military. She spoke in a slow and determined tone. "Are you planning to shoot my husband down?"

The military officer met her gaze, then shifted his eyes just to the left of her face. "Of course not."

Annie rubbed Dana's back. Her bracelets clinked softly, the musical jangle of twenty-four carat gold. "They would never do something like that," Annie said, "Not with all these witnesses."

Dana turned to address the entire group. "I'm sure he'll be down any minute. We have a reservation tonight for *Le Dang* and I am *certain* he won't want to miss that." Annie raised her eyebrows. "Oh it's fabulous. You're right, no one would miss that."

Dana looked at Annie. "You've been?"

Annie and Don both nodded. "Opening night. The foie gras," he began, and just stopped and shook his head in awe. "Words just don't."

There was a sudden flurry of activity as a group of men ran down the beach toward the water. A murmur ran through the crowd and then the men were back, handing Reilly something shiny. He held his palm out to Dana. "These were just recovered," Reilly said.

In his hand was a set of keys. For a moment Dana said nothing, then, "He threw those down? Did he throw those down?"

"Yes ma'am."

Dana took the keys and gripped them tightly. She spoke softly, her defiance now gone. "They're for the BMW."

Up, Up, and Away

Dana turned then and walked away from the group. She walked several yards to where the sand was hard and crusty on top like a creme brulee, soft and silky underneath when her feet broke the surface. She sat on the sand and hugged her knees to her chest. She looked up into the sky, already knowing what she would see but fiercely hoping she would be wrong. There, in the sky, was Roger, now detached from the kite, soaring higher and farther and becoming a smaller speck each second, leaving his wife while everyone watched.

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