

Sure Horizons

Zora sat at the crossroads. North, South, East and West. Which way? Each direction opened to her like a choose your own adventure book. Eventually the different roads would diverge into their own myriad of directions. But for now, she settled dreaming of the different horizons shimmering in the distance of each roadway.

She paused for another 5 minutes staring into her rearview mirror, remembering what lay behind her. Life, love, heartbreak, happiness and sadness. All woven together like a ball of wool. She imagined herself sitting on a porch rolling that ball, sometimes loose, other times tight.

Zora's thoughts drifted back to her career as an aged care worker; the elderly that never seemed to have their precious family members visit them. The way their eyes lit up when they looked at the photos mounted on the walls and they spoke about the good times they spent together at special occasions, or even just short visits. She always swore she would never be old and lonely like her clients; regretting experiences life had offered them, but they had chosen to ignore, until they became too old. And then regrets filled their days.

She pictured herself running along the beach at dawn with a white shaggy dog. Sitting in the dunes together and watching the sun breach the horizon; maybe it would peek from behind white puffy clouds, or maybe the colours would explode across the clear sky. She wanted to return home to the love of a good man, who roused when she and the noisy pooch raced in the front door greeting them with a kind smile and eyes filled with love.

Her reality was much different. Zora would wake everyday looking out over the dreary city, clouded with low hanging smog. In the winter months, full of smoke from the suburban wood fires, the icy chill never seemed to leave the townhouse, and some days, her heart. The 'love of her life' rolling over in bed demanding she get up and cook him breakfast, like a short order cook, only to complain that it wasn't what he wanted. Going to work for 12-hour shifts. Cleaning, catering and caring for the elderly. She loved her clients, but there were days when she wanted to bury her head in a pillow and scream at the indecency they suffered. She did the best she could in the time given to make their

Sure Horizons

world as comfortable as possible. To show that there were still people who cared for them and treated them as independent beings.

Only to return home to an unkempt townhouse. Food scraps and wrappers and dirty clothes scattered throughout the living room. Questioned about what she was making for dinner, why hadn't she started cleaning the house yet and where was his favourite shirt? The boys were expecting him for drinks in 30 minutes and he wanted his dinner before he left. Never mind that she was the sole income provider in the relationship, and they could barely pay the bills they had without his 'boys poker night'. Struggle Street seemed to be their only destination in life.

Zora looked to the right and made the decision to go north. Surely there would be sunshine aplenty in the Northern state? Before she could change her mind, she knocked her indicator down, took her foot off the brake and accelerated. She had done it! No more self doubt about her choices in life. Only looking forward.

And then the dark cloud loomed again. Mrs Dempsey, her favourite client. They had considered themselves a team for the last 5 years. As the last friend of Mrs D's had faded into her aging memories, Zora became the only person in her life to truly care. Mrs D had no family left, being the youngest Dempsey child and remaining with her parents to care for them. She had never had the chance at a life of her own. Zora often made special trips to visit Mrs D. Bringing her homemade goodies when the ingredients could be afforded. Huddled together on the sofa, covered by the scratchy crocheted blanket, they'd tell each other of their long-forgotten hopes and dreams. Mrs D pushed for Zora to escape and create a new life for herself. Offering her money to run with. Zora didn't have the strength to leave. And she refused to take any money off the person she considered to be her only true friend.

Sure Horizons

And then the first night he didn't come home, he said he was out with the boys and fell asleep on their couch. Although he didn't offer much of an apology, she forgave him. She was expected to. She was also a fool. The third time he stumbled home early into the next day, he reeked of a younger woman's perfume. Zora emotionally checked out of the relationship. She knew what he been up to, and he remained oblivious to her knowledge. Zora knew she had to play a smart game. He would try to take everything he could from the relationship if she let him. Mrs D's offer rang in her mind. A source of money that he knew nothing of, and never would. Because, truthfully, Zora would never take a cent from her friend. She would much rather her company that the dollars she could give her.

Zora pulled up at a rest area on the side of the road. Her mind wandering to the day of Mrs D's funeral. The sadness that overwhelmed her. The only person who truly understood her, gone. She grieved for weeks afterwards. Doing her job and going home to the sadness that enveloped her and drew her down to a depth she had never been. She felt utterly alone and had no reason to look for any positives in her life. He chose that moment in time to leave. Claiming to have found the love of his life. Someone filled with such happiness and joy his heart exploded for her. Zora played her part well, begging and pleading for another chance, while a little sliver of sunlight broke through the grey.

She watched him pack his meagre belongings. He didn't want anything from the "slum" they lived in. His new lover had much better belongings. After he left, Zora threw open the windows and aired out the last of his smell, aided with some good old Spray and Wipe and Glen 20. She knew she would be leaving as soon as the lease was up at the end of the next month. She set her mind to packing what she would need on her new adventure. Everything else was to be sold to finance her new life.

Sure Horizons

She resigned from her job, and with her two weeks' notice, spent valuable time with her remaining clients, showering them with all the love they deserved. When she stopped at the office to hand back her uniforms the week before her new life was to start, she was informed of an investigation held into the bequeathment of Mrs D's savings to Zora. Zora was adamant that there must be some relative to inherit what Mrs D had left her, but the manager of the care facility was just as adamant that Zora was the only beneficiary named. That Mrs D had specifically denied all relatives due to their lack of attendance in her life. The manager handed over a cheque for Zora to bank, but her eyes fell on the crocheted blanket on the side table. It was the same blanket Mrs D and Zora had spent many hours snuggled under sharing their dreams. The blanket was the only belonging that Zora truly wanted. It would give her comfort in the coming days, months and possibly years. The gentle hug of a true friend, a source of strength.

Zora pulled back onto the highway. She reached across to the passenger seat and felt the scratchy wool against her hand. The comfort was like a heat spreading across her fingers. The surety in her choice vibrated through to her heart.

She raised her eyes to the horizon laid out before her. The only surety in life, was the future she was going to make for herself. That she would carry Mrs D in her heart for the rest of her days and live her life to the fullest of her potential. She would step through every door opened to her and not mourn those that close behind her. And to find that beautiful white shaggy dog to play with on the beach.