

## MEASURED BY YOUR WEIGHT

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“You feel that Brian?”

Blinking his eyes open and rubbing them clear, still unable to see in the dark room, he replied, “All I feel is pressure.” Straining, his eyes found the ethereal blue light from the street spilling through the chinks in the curtains; the light from his clock told him he had been fighting to return to sleep for an hour.

Turning his head, guessing at the direction of the voice, towards the rustling of the curtain, wondering, *did I see movement, or simply hear it?* “I’m not sure I understand,” he asked in a hushed tone.

“That’s what I mean. I’m Corey. You’ve been preoccupied, let’s talk.”

“Preoccupied with what?”

“You tell me. Don’t worry about whispering, there’s no one here to bother.”

“I thought I was dreaming.” Examining Corey, if that really was her name, he could see through her long flowing dress, a cool night breeze rippling through the curtains and her dress as though they were made of the same length of fabric. Rubbing his eyes some more and raising himself up on his elbows, he felt as though he had woken up in a new place and a different time zone, but still in his own room. He could see a figure revealed through the translucent fabric of her dress, but it wasn’t the form of a female, but rather of his room. He examined his dresser with a partially closed drawer, a chair with yesterday’s coat lain over the back and the door to the toilet. Everything he knew to be there, yet appeared new and unusual.

“Perhaps, but it doesn’t really matter. What some call dreaming, others call enlightenment.”

“Not hallucinations?”

“That’s another name. Slight variations of the same state; let’s talk about why I’m here. It’s about the pressure you feel.”

“It’s so heavy. All the time, the pressure—in everything.”

“Good. That’s important.”

“But it’s too much. I can’t carry it.”

“It’s not just pressure, but the weight that’s important. Actually, it’s about the weight you feel.”

“Is that true?”

“Of course, it’s important; everything I tell you is true. If I lied you’d probably see right through me.” She said, laughing at her own joke. “I’m sorry, I can’t help that one.”

Shaking his head and rubbing his eyes again he asked “But who are you? How do I know you’re real?”

“The same why you know a chair or a car is real. You either accept that I am or you don’t. But if I’m not real, how would I know about the weight you bear?”

“It’s so heavy,” he said.

“It’s not as bad as it feels.”

He stared at Corey and wondered how much she knew, struggling to reconcile how she could be real and yet transparent. “What— how do you— what do you mean?”

“How do I what? How do I know?”

Nodding his head, he whispered, “yeah.”

“The same way I know that you’re speaking in hushed tones because sometimes the night feels like it will be disturbed by anything more. I know because that’s what I do.”

“But what are you?”

“That’s not the question Brian. You’re finding something else to preoccupy you. You can continue to latch on to new questions; only displacing preoccupations with distractions but that won’t see you forward. You need to focus on a solution not the problem. The question you should focus on is about how you can manage the weight you feel.”

“OK,” Brian sighed, “So it’s not as bad as it feels, what do you mean?”

“Do you remember your studies, how it felt then?”

Thinking back, he tried to reconcile a faded memory of what his life once was, it was difficult but the challenges were obviously surmountable. Student loans, minimum wage, rationed groceries, tuition, and books; time dispensed between work, classes, and study; all part of his weekly burden. “Sort of, I guess, it was years ago. It wasn’t the same. I managed the pressure then. It’s heavier now.”

“It’s never the same. Life is like that, it’s cumulative.” Walking around the room, Corey continued. “You struggled learning to tie your shoes but once you did, you’ve never looked back. You’ve forgotten the volunteer work you did to get into grad school. Hours that you thought you couldn’t bear. Do you remember how the weight felt then?”

Her words hung in the room like the odour of heavily fragranced flowers. “No,” he replied looking up at her, squinting as though his understanding was connected to his vision. “I remember the centers and the clients. It was their issues; their poverty and their addictions, the lack of access they had to services that I remember. Looking back now, I think I could have probably done more. Maybe I could have. I mean, I certainly think I could have taken on more, now that I see what I’m doing now.”

“Yes”

“Yes, what?” Brian asked watching her move around the room.

“Indeed.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What about your studies? Could you have been more diligent? More committed to them?”

“I meant to, but —”

“But you passed anyway.”

“Yes I suppose, but I don’t know. I could have done more but just never did.”

“That’s because at the time you felt that was as far as you could go. That the weight was all you could bear.”

“So, was I wrong?”

“Perhaps.”

Unable to suppress the anxiety rising in his voice, the night’s chill struck him deeper than it should. Watching the breeze rippling through the curtains and Corey, he asked with a wavering voice, “You mean I should have done more for people then?”

“No, not necessarily, I just mean you’re capable of doing more than you think.”

“But I didn’t so what—what does that say about me?”

“Is that what you’re preoccupied with, what’s being said about you?”

“Maybe. I don’t know, am I?”

“I don’t think so, what’s said about you is important, of course, but it’s not the only thing bothering you. It’s probably not all and certainly not the root of your distraction.”

“But then what is it? What’s the weight?”

“It’s your sense of responsibility, it comes from holding yourself accountable.”

“The problem is the weight of responsibility? I don’t understand.”

“You’re only ever worth your weight, but it’s the weight that you carry which is measured.”

“So I can carry more then,” he said with a sigh.

“Yes. Indeed. You could have done more. We always can, but you did what you did and helped those who were there. Isn’t that enough for you?”

“I’m not understanding the rhetoric. Could I do more, or was it enough?”

“Both. You could have probably done more but for those you helped it was enough for them. You made a difference. Sometimes more is just more. There are times where what you can give is enough for those you help and others when it’s never enough. Sometimes what you give, ends up costing you more than it provides others.”

“What about now?”

“What about it? If you mean can you do more you’re asking a question where you should be building understanding.”

“I feel overwhelmed. I try to do more but I just feel more responsible.”

“Of course you do, that’s how it works. One takes the moment and feels overwhelmed, but after it passes, we gather our calm and our recollection changes. People wouldn’t keep having babies if they only remembered the stress that pregnancy carries and pain birthing brings. Instead we recall the scent of newborns, the accomplishments of children; all the effervescent moments of joy. It’s the pleasure that brings us back.

“But you’re right, the more you take on, the more the responsibility builds. It creates a mental weight that’s felt the same way any mass would be. Do you remember the myth about Atlas?”

“The titan that held up the sky?”

“Yes, it’s the metaphor of having the weight of the world on your shoulders. But it’s more than just that. It wasn’t that Atlas’ punishment was the physical labour, otherwise he would have been given a more Sisyphean task. Atlas was trapped in a state of being responsible, rather than merely the physical burden of keeping the heavens and earth apart. The consequence of failure that weighed the most for the condemned Titan. It’s the very same way a porter can carry water for a village, her yolk is heaviest when there’s scarcity and every drop spilled results in deprivation.”

“So this is normal?”

“It’s normal for people that care, yes.”

“But it seems so heavy.”

“Remember, before you surrender that which you consider a burden, ultimately you’re measured by the weight you bear and not the influence you wield.”

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