

*Worth Her*  
WEIGHT

*Worth Her Weight*  
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*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

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## CHAPTER *One*

The acid from Mom's hurtful words burned. Only a gooey, cream-filled donut could neutralize the pain. That, and maybe a couple of Snickers. *I'm not going crazy.* The phone heated Lacey's hand. She wanted to drop it to the desk, but Mom's prattle continued.

"You're going nuts like your dad." Her words sliced through Lacey like a tornado in a Texas cornfield.

Mom droned on about her visit with Katie, Lacey's kid sister. Lacey opened a desk drawer, lifting out her bottle of Prozac. She turned it over to read the directions. If she downed these pills, her disappointing life would end. Old thoughts resurfaced, bringing a longing for peace but a warning of hellfire.

Mom took a breath between words. Lacey's office was quiet except for the phone-voice of condemnation.

Reality dawned on Lacey with the bong of the office clock on the hour. She was a Christian. She was not crazy. She would conquer this weight problem.

Her mother let out a long sigh. "Lacey, are you there?"

"Yes, Mom, I'm here." Lacey increased her volume. "I'm me, not Dad, and not Katie. Me." Mom never made accusations about Katie's drug addiction. Mom didn't call her crazy. Lacey bit into her third donut.

If something happened to Lacey, Mom would miss the paycheck, the help at home. A longing for love washed over Lacey like a spring shower. She refused to take the coward's way, but maybe she should leave town.

Let Mom fend for herself. She'd soon be begging for her crazy daughter to return.

Lacey spread the tattered pamphlet across her desk once more and read, "Christian Singles Cruise." Only two more weeks before registration ended. Might be eligible men there. Hope rose in her heart, but like a blip on the screen of her monitor, it all too quickly vanished. Learning to swim at the age of six was easier than stuffing her bulk into a size triple-X swimsuit at twenty-six.

Mom's monologue escalated to a tirade while Lacey gazed out her office window. Small oak trees lifted branches to a hazy blue sky. She heard a squeak. The chirping of crows filtered inside. The front door had opened.

"I've got to go, Mom. Someone came in. See you tomorrow after you get home." Lacey hung up the phone and turned to see how she could help the lady who'd entered her office.

Standing in front of Lacey's desk, the woman held out a check.

"How are you today?" Lacey reached out to accept the woman's money. "I'll put this on your account."

As the lady opened the door to leave, Marion Ferguson from next door's insurance office passed to enter. "I want you to meet my grandson." Her eyes danced.

The four-year-old tore around the office using his arms as airplane wings. Lacey chased the small boy until he broke out in giggles.

Myrna Cutter, Lacey's boss, peered around her private office door. "When's my first patient?"

Lacey stopped flying and put on her serious expression. "Not until one."

"I need to get this boy out of here so you can work." With a pained look, Marion ushered out her grandson.

Myrna watched the boy shuffle out the door and then moved closer to the reception desk. A huge bag with a logo reading *North Texas Mental Health* swung from her shoulder. "I think I'll run some errands. If you would, call the hospital administrator and make me an appointment for tomorrow."

"Okay." Lacey gritted her teeth as she dialed the now familiar number.

Myrna left, escaping the distasteful duty.

Lacey's napkin soaked up the donut's glaze like her heart held resentment. Sweat beaded her upper lip. *Please, Mr. Haggerty, don't answer.*

He did. "Put Ms. Cutter on the phone." His response set Lacey's teeth on edge. She drew large quivery circles on her scratch pad. "She's not here now."

"Then tell her if she wants to see me tomorrow she can call me herself. I might work her in."

Lacey's voice softened. "I'll tell her, sir." The phone slipped across her sweaty palms. After this, Myrna could do her own feuding. Lacey didn't like being the middleman. When the man disconnected, her fingers unfolded, dropping the receiver before she regained control.

She shifted her gaze to see if anyone had noticed, but she was alone. With a deep sigh, she encouraged herself with a reminder that tonight she'd be alone. Her mother would stay with her sister in Apache Falls one more evening before coming home. Let the day roll. Tonight, she would have the house to herself.

By six o'clock, Lacey was unlocking the side door of her white, thirties-style house, the boxy ones with huge front porches. She noticed the flaking paint. Her house needed attention, along with everything else in her life. Her self-worth drooped at the door.

Plopping into her green leather recliner, a romance book in one hand and a bag of peanut butter cups in the other, she breathed a sigh of contentment. Food seemed to be the only friend she had.

*A fickle friend.* With each bite of the smooth peanut butter, she swallowed more guilt. Toby Wheeler, her self-proclaimed conscience and good buddy, would tell her Jesus was her best friend, and Lacey didn't disagree. Yet, as her life plummeted into an abyss, Jesus was nowhere in sight. She put those dismal thoughts out of her mind for now and let the sweetness of the candy dissolve her tension.

She'd regret her actions tonight when she tossed about on her bed and couldn't sleep.

She'd regret her actions in the morning hours as she prepared for the workday with a sugar hangover.

She'd regret her actions while she worked tomorrow in a heavily-cafeinated fog.

But, for the moment, she relished the taste, threw aside a wrapper, and popped another treat.

The doorbell rang.

Great. Anxious and unsteady, she pondered her plight. She wanted to be left alone to wallow in misery. The intruder could be a Girl Scout selling cookies. That would be a good thing. Glancing over the den, she scooped the empty wrappers under the cushion and set the half-filled bag on the dining table.

She peeped around the front curtain, but couldn't see anyone in the day's lingering shadows.

A kick and shuffle from the porch pricked her curiosity.