

## LONG JUMP

By Sean Monaghan

Janice jumped at the sound. She lowered her key. Someone was inside the apartment. She stepped back from the door and reached into her shoulder bag for her phone.

Another thump, closer to the door this time. Someone inside throwing her stuff around.

Janice tapped the menu, called Alex. As it rang she went to the stairs, looked down towards his apartment.

'Hey,' Alex said.

'Are you at home?' she whispered.

'Sure. Sopranos marathon on-'

'Get up here now.'

'Why are you whisperi-'

'Now. Someone's in my place.' She heard another thump, then something breaking. Mom's bowl, she thought, imagining the carnival glass splintering across the tiles.

'On my way,' Alex said.

She heard his door open, then he was running up, still in his TV clothes, beer in one hand, phone in the other, Pringles crumbs on his sweater. He was nothing like the old days when they were doing track together, but it was good to have him close.

'Okay,' he said, puffing a little. 'What's up?'

'Listen,' she whispered.

But there was nothing. After a moment, Alex raised his eyebrows, widened his eyes, tilted his head. 'And?'

'Wait.' Janice stepped closer to the door. Still nothing.

'Fire escape?' Alex said.

Janice grabbed her key and leapt at the door. A click and it was open. Glass on the floor from her trophy cabinet. She ran along the passage

to the living room. Someone was there trying to get out the window. Wraparound sunglasses, hoodie, trackpants.

'Hey.'

He looked up.

'What the hell do you think-'

He sprinted at her. Straight at her.

Janice sidestepped and the intruder collided with Alex. Both of them tumbled to the floor. The man kicked at Alex and scrambled to his feet. Then he was heading down the passage to the door.

'Alex?' She went to him.

'I'm okay.' He started to get up. 'Don't let him get away.'

Janice dropped her bag and ran after the intruder. She realised that there was something missing from the cabinet as she flew past. Why the hell would anyone want to steal her old trophies. Gold plating worth fifty cents?

Mrs Hudson and her latest suitor were on the stairs just below the landing and the man had to head up. Janice followed.

'Miss Echelle?' Mrs Hudson called after her.

'It's under control Mrs Hudson,' she called back.

'Oh good dear.'

The man was fast, taking the stairs two and three at a time. Where was he going? Another apartment? It was five floors to the roof and the door was permanently jimmed. Surely he wouldn't go to the roof. Where could he go from there?

She came around a landing and saw him standing on the next landing up, facing her. Something hit her chest and knocked her back. She stumbled and fell against an apartment door and he was gone, still running up.

On the floor one of her trophies, Louisville trials 1996, triple-jump, second place. He'd thrown it at her and now it was broken, the base snapped off at the gold-athlete's legs.

She stared for a moment, then went after him again. Steps three, four at a time. Swinging around the balustrades, using her momentum on

the landings to push herself on up. Four steps, push, four steps, three steps, landing swing around. Four steps. She got her rhythm. She could hear him pounding on the stairs above. Two more levels to the roof.

'Get back here,' she yelled.

'Leave me alone,' he shouted back' A few more thumps, then she heard the door to the roof get kicked open.

Swing, four steps, four steps, three, swing, four, four, three and she was at the door.

She jumped out onto the gravel, saw his blur as he went over the side to the next building. She kept moving. The building was one storey lower and she dropped almost right behind him. She grabbed the hoodie, and he looked at her, glasses lost. Just a kid, fifteen or sixteen. He rolled away from her. Sprinting again.

Janice smiled. No next building, just the 21st street alley. Nowhere to go.

But he was still running. Still running. She followed, slower now. He kept going. Kept going. Jumped.

Janice ran again as he vanished from sight. The alley was narrow here, and the building across the street even lower, but he wouldn't make it.

She came to the edge and looked out. Not dead. Hanging on to lip of the building over twenty feet away. One of his hands came away and he swung, feet scrambling again.

Janice turned back and focused on a mark. Turned at the mark and breathed. She ducked her head and pounded across the asphalt. Three, two, one and she put her foot right on the edge. Out and over. Spinning to grab as much air as she could. A car beneath, a siren in the distance. Lights in her eyes from the apartments. Out and out and over.

She came down on the roof. Her foot slid out and she tumbled, rolled against an aircon fan.

To her feet and two quick steps and she grabbed his wrist. His other arm came up and she pulled him onto the roof. They sat together breathing. He was crying and he looked so young and small.

'I dropped your trophies,' he said. 'Down there.'

Janice smiled a little, looking back across the alley. 'Yeah, well. I'll have to measure it, but I think that was my personal best.'

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