

## WHAT HAPPENED SUNDAY MORNING

Erika Munson

When Danny DiLorenzo got up to speak I was thinking about how I could loosen my tie. My mother makes me wear one, and after an hour my body fights back. I stand in front of the chapel during meetings and hold the microphone—waiting to give it to someone who's ready to stand and bear their testimony. It's a tricky job; you don't want to hand a mic to a mom who's taking out her whiny kid, or embarrass some old guy who's heading to the bathroom. I usually scan the faces in the congregation, searching for signs of the Spirit. But when Danny stood up I wasn't thinking about any of that. My collar felt so tight I couldn't focus. It made it hard to breathe.

Danny was in high school but looked older. He came to church by himself and his mom—wherever she was—didn't make him wear a tie. His little grey neck poked out of a blue work shirt. I really didn't know a thing about him, but we were all used to his presence. You learn to accept people the missionaries drag in. The only time I'd heard Danny's voice louder than a mumble was at his baptism last year. He came up out of the water with his white clothes sticking to him; his mouth made a happy O as he took a breath. "This is so great," he had said, almost in a shout.

I handed him the microphone and stepped back, planting myself in the aisle. While everyone was watching Danny I could undo my collar. I slipped my thumb and finger under the knot of my tie and found the edges of the small button. I managed to hold tight and push it in and then out of the buttonhole. A gentle current of air made its way between my sweaty neck and shirt. Thank you, I prayed silently. Thank you for helping me with this little thing; for getting it on the first try while no one was looking.

Danny was speaking softly and very fast. He was talking about some calamity that God had saved him from. The morning began, he said, with his crew entering the command module of Apollo 1 for a launch simulation.

Wait a minute.

The deck, he said, was full of high-pressure oxygen. There was a funny smell. A fire broke out.

I stood still, my eyes flying around for some distraction. The big round chapel window would work; it hung like an amber moon over Danny's shoulder. When I was little, sitting squished between Mom and Dad and hurting with boredom while I swung my short legs from the pew, I would silently count the glass panes in the window like I was taking my turn at Candyland: one—two—three—four—five—six—seven.

Bishop Hansen got down from behind the pulpit and walked toward him. Danny kept talking, the story pouring out of him. The hatch was sealed, there was no way out. NASA placed a call to President Johnson. Smoke was everywhere; his spacesuit was on fire. We were burning up, Danny said, but his voice was calm.

The Bishop reached for the microphone as if it were the most natural thing in the world to stop someone mid-testimony. Danny didn't resist. He finished in a hurry, running all his words together.

"I'm just happy to be alive in the name of Jesus Christ amen."

He sat down with a little smile; his black eyes alight. As the quiet minutes ticked by (who was going to follow that performance?) Danny's face returned to its usual pasty blankness.

The bishop gave me the mic and I suppose he expected us all to carry on. But there was no way I could do that. No matter how many happy stories about God's love anyone else would tell that day, I couldn't get those doomed astronauts out of my head—banging on the glass, screaming to get out.