

long ago stopped blaming herself. With the push of a syringe, addiction forced its way into Angela's life. Loretta was powerless to stop it, feeling her own life pulled along in the slipstream of her daughter's destruction.

Tonight Angela's absence was like a weight on her chest. The unrealized dreams were squeezing her heart, searing her throat. Sweat beaded on her clammy skin and ran like rivulets between her shoulder blades. Her breathing quickened as anxiety consumed her.

An unfulfilled fantasy, like a delirium, washed over her. In it, Angela was happily married — the mother of a curly-haired girl, bright and strong and confident, with smiling blue eyes. This child liked to knit and sew, and was content to sit by her grandmother's side sharing the joy of working with her hands.

But it was not to be. Loretta sank to the floor of her

apartment, alone but for the lyrics that whispered in her ear:

*All the dreams we held so close seemed to all
go up in smoke
Let me whisper in your ear
Angie, Angie*

She listened, and her pain eased. She felt a tingling sensation on her neck as if someone was touching her. The light flickered for a moment and Loretta knew that all would be right. Outside, the Christmas lights sparkled like multicoloured stars. No one noticed the snowflakes melt as they met the earth.

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