

## “Dream a little dream of me.”\*

Flash fiction for guests of the WordFeeder.

Saturday, November 8, 2008

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“Bobby?” As tiny as their apartment was, there were times when they couldn’t see each other. “Bobby, where are you?!” She shouted, struggling with one hand to dump their bedroom trashcan into the big garage bag she was holding in her other, and do it in the less than 18” they had between that one side of their bed and the wall with the window to the fire escape.

“Hi, Dorothy.” It was the shrill, instant headache, unforgivingly cheerful voice of her neighbor, the older lady that lived on her same floor but in the building that backed up against theirs.

“Hi, Mrs. Donnelly,” she answered reluctantly, pausing a second to look over rather than feeling bad the rest of the night for having ignored her. “How,” she thought to herself, “could someone that nice be so annoying?” “It’s cold out,” she said out loud this time, “shouldn’t you be closing your window?”

“You’ve got yours open” She was annoying, but not stupid.

“You’re right, Mrs. Donnelly. What was I thinking? ..Good night now,” and she reached up to pull the lower half of the window down, turning the lock and waving goodbye with a quick back and forth motion of her hand. “ ... Bobby!”

“What?!” came the muffled, frustrated voice of her husband from behind the pocket door at the end of their kitchen, “I’m in the bathroom. Give me a break.”

“I’m taking the trash out.”

“Fine, fine, fine,” he responded with almost, but not quite complete disinterest, followed by the sounds of his turning the page and then refolding the front section of that morning’s Times he was just getting around to reading.

“Ummmh.” She was strong for being only five foot three, but the old metal door to their apartment, made heavier by more than a hundred years of sloppy paint, always took her best effort. Somehow the grunt seemed to help. “I’ll be right back,” she mumbled, not wanting to make herself heard over the banging shut of the door behind her. Instinctively, she patted the right front pocket of her jeans to make sure she had her key, the garbage bag she was carrying brushing up against the plaster wall of their narrow hallway.

Five flights down and around the marble steps of the converted tenement where they lived, past the building mail box, and she was almost at the door to the side alley. Outside there was a platform and two steps down to where the trash cans and, yes, an occasional rat would be

waiting. But these were good, West Village rats, bohemian and more friendly than most in the city, so she liked to think, that fortunately she had never had the pleasure of meeting.

She took out the garbage every night after dinner, but tonight would be different. Tonight, coming around the corner past the mailboxes, in the dim light from the high ceiling above her, there on the small dirty white tiles just ahead of where she was walking, there was something dark on the floor. Letting the bag she was holding in her left hand down slowly, she bent over, not wanting to kneel down. Leaning forward, it was... it was.. “Blood?” she whispered calmly, at first, until the almost academic nature of her investigation was interrupted by the “chunk” of the door a few feet in front of her.

“Oh, my God!” she whispered nervously. “There must have been someone there,” she thought to herself. And then something else caught her attention. To her right, on the wall, she extended her own hand as if to touch the red print, smeared as if someone had pressed their hand against the wall on their way down to the floor. Turning her hand slowly to see her palm, a wave of fear unlike anything she had ever imagined finally hit her.

“BOBBEEEE!!!” Dorothy turned to run up the five flights back to her apartment.  
“BOBBEEEE!!” she kept shouting, running as fast as she could...

“What?! What’s wrong,” he rolled and sat up on his side of their bed. “What is it?” But then he knew, seeing her sitting up, staring at the palm of her right hand, her face contorted with fear, her chest heaving as it fought to catch the breath she didn’t really need to take. “Com’on,” he said, reaching around and pulling her toward him. “It’s just a dream, the same dream you keep having. ...It’s not real. It’s not real, honey.”

It took what seemed to be forever, but she finally calmed down and fell back to sleep in his arms lying there, her head against his chest, his arm still around her.

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“Mr. Cooper? ...Mr. Cooper?”

“Yes, Doctor. Sorry, I...”

“It’s okay. You’ve been here with her for two days now. I’m sorry I had wake you, but I’m getting out of here for the night and didn’t want to leave without giving you an update.”

“So how’s she doing, Doctor?” Bobby asked, getting up from the chair by the window where he had finally fallen asleep, exhausted to the point of shaking when he talked. “Why isn’t she conscious yet? Shouldn’t she...”

“Hold on. I think she’s going to be okay. Actually, physically, she appears to be recovering well from the surgery.”

“Then why isn’t she...”

“Bobby, listen to me,” he responded, doing his best to calm Bobby down. “Think about it... She goes down to take out the trash, like she does every night, but this time she interrupts some spaced out druggie who’d apparently come in, the Police aren’t sure why, panics and shoots her. That kind of trauma does things to your head. If one of your neighbors hadn’t stopped by for his mail, she could have died, could have bled to death, but she didn’t. She’s going to be okay. This tossing you see, this squinting and anxiety you see in her face... She’s fighting on one hand to wake up, but on the other to stay under, to make it a dream, to fight the reality of what’s happened to her.”

“When do you...”

“I don’t know, Bobby. You sit by the bed like you’ve been doing. Hold her hand. Talk to her. Most of all, let her hear your voice. ...You’ll both be okay.”

\*From the lyrics by Gus Kahn.

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