

Kathy

by Adam Sifre

"Happy New Year Willie." Kathy scratched the dog behind its ears. Willie obliged her with a satisfied groan and then returned to gnawing at his marrow bone.

Kathy buried herself a little deeper into the Afghan, and enjoyed the pocket of warmth. Outside the house, the wind had kicked up and the temperature continued to flee, but inside the fire was busy and did a good job of keeping the chill at bay.

Kathy smiled and closed her eyes, letting the heat from the fireplace gently bake her face. How many winter nights had she spent in her Daniel's arms before he'd been taken away.

"So many and not enough," she sighed. Willie signaled his agreement by taking his marrow bone to the far corner of the living room, where one of his three doggie beds lay. This one was best for catching the morning sun and just close enough to the fire to make it his favorite.

Kathy laughed. "Daniel always said I spoiled you."

She missed all the little mundane things that had so enriched her -- the background noise of marriage, she supposed. She was an old woman now, with an old dog and an apartment filled with her life. Shot glasses from South Beach, a piece of blue ribbon that she'd worn on her wedding day, ticket stubs from first concerts and rose petals from first boyfriends. They all had their place among a thousand other memories -- many stashed or displayed throughout the apartment and some only saved in her mind.

If you could see the old lady and her old dog on that cold, New Year's eve, you might pity her. To be alone on these days can be a terrible thing.

But Kathy was not alone. Her Daniel was there, rubbing her feet by the fire. Music from the Kinks floated up from ticket stubs, as clear as if from the concert hall. There were warm smells of countless Thanksgivings fighting with the pine needles of Christmas

for her attention. There was rum and whisky and, yes, a little sin that rested on her chapped lips that night. Lips chapped from cold and age now, but once from over eager boys. And underneath it all there were hugs, and laughter and singing, and dancing and decadent desserts, some tasted when she was young, and naked.

On this cold and quiet New Years eve, Kathy sat before a fire, with only an old dog to keep her company.

And she was beautiful.

