

Dream Life (flash friday)

by Tanya L. Schofield

Virginia woke reluctantly, part of her still wanting to be back in her dream with Glen. She was a practical woman. Dreams were not reality, no matter how much she secretly wished they were. Glen had been gone for thirty-eight years, but she still felt that instant of disappointment when she woke next to William. She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath before slipping out of the bed without disturbing her husband.

William was a good man, and he had been a loving provider. He had been a good father to Melissa, now grown with girls of her own, and Virginia hated herself for every moment she spent wondering what it would have been like if things had been different. How would her life be if Glen hadn't been misdiagnosed, if he hadn't died when she was a year married and four months pregnant? Not that it mattered now.

Virginia dressed quietly and went downstairs. She had loaded the boxes of clothes into the trunk of the car yesterday, so all that remained was to leave a note for William and head out to town. She would be able to drop the boxes off at Goodwill and still make it to the hospital by eight. She wasn't scheduled today, but they could always use the help and Glen had been so clear about what he needed her to do.

If you had told her six months ago that she would be retired from her lifelong career at the Bloomfield Bank and Trust, donating most of her possessions and volunteering her time, Virginia would have scoffed. But then the dreams started, and Glen had spent hours telling her how possible it was, how close he was ... everything had changed. Now she gave her time to hospitals, soup kitchens, nursing homes - anything she could think of. She did crafts with schoolchildren and assembled care packages for soldiers overseas, she spent time with shelter animals and made blankets to give to the homeless.

He could come back. The thought echoed in her head with every heartbeat, she could feel it in the tips of her fingers. He had told her himself, in her dreams. Virginia knew better, of course, but if there was even a possibility ... Every good work you do brings me closer, he had said. Each act of charity is a step closer to life, real life, a life with you. It sounded crazy now, with the sun peeking over the tree line as she drove towards Goodwill. But at night, when it was just the two of them again and he called her Ginny instead of Virginia and they were in the swing in the backyard and he was singing "Dream a Little Dream" in her ear like he used to do -- He was older in her dreams, too. He was as old as he would be if he hadn't died, that had to give some sort of credibility to her mental state. She wasn't crazy, no matter how it would sound if she said any of it out loud.

Virginia threw herself into the work, smiling. Every visitor she directed to a room, every gift shop bouquet and stuffed toy she delivered, each was a step closer to being with Glen again. At the beginning, when she first believed it was possible, she had worried. If Glen came back, how would that change her relationship with William? How would she introduce him to Melissa and the kids? How could she explain where he had been?

But now she didn't even think about things like that. If Glen could make it back to her, whatever power that was helping him would make it all work out. And as senseless as it was, Virginia was determined to do her part.

She got home before dinner and made hamburger casserole for William, who never asked her about her volunteer work. They washed the dishes together, as they always did, and then William lay on the couch to watch CSI through his closed eyelids while Virginia got on the computer and looked for new ways to help people. William got up and went to bed before the news, and Virginia stayed up to watch it over her nightly cup of coffee.

She waited as long as she could, barely seeing the story about the truck that had hydroplaned on the highway during the big storm. Miraculously, neither the driver nor anyone else was injured. All she

could focus on, though, was waiting for William to be asleep so she could back to bed. The last thing she needed was to drift into sleep and say Glen's name with William listening.

Finally the coffee was gone and the sports section was over, which was usually her cue that William would be lightly snoring in that way he had that used to be endearing. Virginia stood, turned off the television, and made her way into the kitchen to rinse out her coffee mug. She didn't bother to turn on the light - after thirty-five years, she knew her way around her house. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up just as she turned off the water and set the mug in the dish drainer, but Virginia didn't need to turn around. She knew.

“Oh, Ginny.”

