

NYQUIL DREAMS

by Veronica Marie Lewis-Shaw

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In the space of a single heartbeat, I am transported from a deep REM sleep to sitting upright in bed... wide awake... heart thudding in my chest... hands reaching out... fingers clutching... trying to grasp a remnant of the dream before it is gone. Too late... again. Only a few tiny shards remain on the floor of my consciousness, waiting to be deciphered, puzzled into something coherent.

Heartbeat slows... respirations squeezing through swollen airways sound unnaturally loud in the small bedroom. The only light is a sliver of dawn peeking through the blinds, hinting at the early hour. I slowly lower my hands, staring across the darkened room, waiting for reality to catch up with the moment.

More like waiting for the doxy fog to lift from your brain, you mean, don't you?

Sitting for a few moments, I remember where I am... staying with Jenny and baby Joshua for a few days. Jenny is post-op once more... poor girl. I told her... shaking the thought aside, I swing my legs over the side of the bed, feet touching the cold hardwood floor... toes probing for slippers.

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While the Oral-B sonically blasts away at last night's growth of plaque germs, I run multiplication tables through my head... a little trick to chase away the last tendrils of the NyQuil-induced fog from what M Poirot charmingly refers to as "*the little gray cells*".

Rummaging in my make-up bag for the DayQuil, I briefly wonder if one can become addicted to the "*Quils*"... probably not I decide, else they would require a prescription, right? I pop two orange gel-caps in my mouth, chasing them with a swallow of water. The capsules tumble around, one of them plinking against the crown in my upper-right jaw. I hate the crown... a mute reminder of the first time Brad hit me. Swallowing the capsules, my tongue probes the

left side of my mouth, finding the other two crowns... also reminders of the monster inside the man I didn't see until it was too late.

I pull the nightshirt over my head, dropping it to the floor behind me. Cupping a breast in each hand, I survey the less than perfect flesh. Barely visible after all this time, the scars remain, nonetheless... seven small marks on each breast... remnants of the cigaret burns Natalie was so fond of inflicting. *"Bitch..."* I utter the same curse each time... it no longer has any strength... but is part of the ritual. Despite my denials, I seem to be the only one who does mind the scars. Turning slightly, I examine my left arm... the trail of small, whitish marks... like the breasts... seven on each arm. The scars are really only noticeable in the summer, when my tan deepens... *"Bitch..."*

"Really, Veronica... if you're going to waltz down memory lane, can't you at least find something a bit more cheerful?" I stare back at the reflection in the mirror, the question unanswered as I study the tiny bags under each eye, evidence of a less than restful sleep. I reach for the hairbrush...

"What's the matter, don't want to talk this morning? You had plenty to say last night." The hairbrush drops out of my hand, striking the edge of the lavatory and falling to the floor.

"What... what did I say...?"

"Nothing I haven't heard before, honey. But, I do have to wonder... everything that happened during those six months... you keep reliving that one thing... you keep going back to that last day... over and over and over... as if you didn't want it to end?"

"Two people died... by my hand... it's not something you easily forget. I..."

"Brad and Natalie deserved to die for what they did to you. Don't forget this... if Brad's aim had been a bit truer, it would be you now, feeding the worms, instead of those two. Oh, I think there is more to it than that, Veronica... don't you?" I stare silently at the mirror, unwilling to give voice to my thoughts.

"Bang! Bang! Two shots... two red blooms..."

"Stop!"

"... two chests explode... two lives...gone in a heartbeat..."

"Stop it!"

"... two lives over, just like that..."

"STOP IT!" My heartbeat doubles as I stare at the stranger in the mirror, dark eyes bright with anger... and something else... fear?

"... they didn't even have time to suffer..... Oh!"

Silence fills the bathroom, growing louder with each passing second. A long sigh...

"Yes... I wanted them to suffer... for every minute... every second of hell they put me through... I wanted them to suffer... to feel the pain I felt...I wanted..... I suppose that makes me..."

"No... no, it doesn't. It makes you human... that's all. But, reliving that moment now, over and over... who's hurting now? Who feels the pain now, Veronica? It's been five years... isn't it time to let it go? You're only punishing yourself."

"You sound like Dr Kay. What if I can't let it go? What if..."

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The knocking on the door is soft, but insistent, pulling me up from the depths of another restless night. Shaking off the remnants of the dream, I sit up in bed and call out. *"Come in."* Jenny pokes her head in... *"Blueberry waffles? You promised."* I smile at my friend. *"Five minutes?"* I ask. She smiles back... *"Coffee's ready"* and closes the door.

Pushing the covers aside, I swing my legs over the edge of the bed, feet touching the cold hardwood floor... toes probing for slippers. Reaching for the cell phone on the bedside table, I dial the number... listen to the after hours recording...

"Hello, Dr. Kay... it's Veronica... yes, Thursday will work for me after all. Thank you."

In the bathroom while the mouthwash is doing its thing, I pop the orange and green gel-caps from their respective blister-packs and flush them down the toilet. The company really should put a warning label on that stuff... too much and it fucks with your mind... resurrecting what one has tried so hard to keep buried.

~ *finis* ~

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Bio: Veronica Marie is a 26 year old teacher / student / barista. Born in Lisboa, Portugal to parents of Portuguese / Russian descent and raised in the Midwest, she now calls the Pacific Northwest home. Veronica and her partner of six and a half years, Christina Anne Shaw, were married in October 2010, and *“are still very much on honeymoon!”* Veronica's long fascination with noir fiction prompted her to try her own hand at writing fiction. Her **Veronica The Pajama Thief** blog can be found at <http://veronicathepajamathief.wordpress.com/>. Veronica also dabbles with poetry at <http://veronicathepajamathiefwritespoetry.blogspot.com/> .

