

A Dream

By Fatima Sabir

An old man with a ragged appearance huddled near the fire in an old sandstone building, a thin brown blanket wrapped around his equally thin shoulders. The bitter winter wind swept through the cracks in the wall, leaving the room frigid, despite the crackling fire. He shifted, trying to get as close as he could to the warmth while leaning against the wall.

To the left of the old man were cabinets, with a leaky faucet making an insistent *drip, drip, drip*, noise. It had been fixed, but the faucet went on leaking no matter who tried to fix it, determined to keep up a constant beat no matter what time of day. This constant sound did not bother the old man, in fact, it lulled him to sleep.

Drip, drip, drip. The old man's eyes opened. Where was he? This wasn't the sandstone building he took to for refuge against nature's rages, but a large Gothic Cathedral, like the ones he had seen as a young man.

"Hello?" he called out.

No answer except for the *drip, drip, drip*-ing.

The man got up, stretching slightly. In surprise he noticed that his back no longer hurt, that his hands no longer looked old, and that he could move freely.

Suddenly, there came a sound of a sob, a heart rending and painful sob.

"Hello?" the man called for the second time. No response.

Finally, the man decided that he should go see who was crying, and if he could help them in any way.

He began to make his way towards the sound, going through twisted grey stone corridors and passing statues of angels until he reached a small enclosed little room.

There was a woman with flaming red hair sobbing in front of what looked like a small, uncovered casket. As the man watched, the lady leaned her head into the casket, pressed a kiss to the person inside, then turned around.

“Harold?” the lady gasped, her grey eyes filled with shock. “What are you doing here?”

“I—Cecilia, I heard you crying, and came to see what had happened.”

“Yes, yes,” Cecilia said impatiently. “I meant what are you doing here now? “I thought you would have been here before the funeral.”

Then Harold remembered. This was over 60 years ago, when their five year-old child had died due to a mysterious illness.

“I—Cecilia, I was going to come—”

“And then what? You got detoured? You weren’t here as soon as you possibly could. You weren’t here for me when Sarah died. You only thought of yourself, not your wife nor your dead daughter.”

Then another voice echoed around the room.

“You weren’t here, Daddy,” the voice was child-like, one that would have been sweet if it didn’t sound so reproachful.

“Sarah?”

Harold glanced around fearfully, trying to locate the voice.

“You weren’t with me when I died.”

“I’m sorry! I had business to attend to, and, and…”

“It’s always business with you, isn’t it, Daddy?” the voice said cruelly. “Not a thought wasted on something that doesn’t have to do with numbers.”

Then everything began to grow, or Harold began to shrink, he didn’t know which. Cecilia’s tears dripped on the ground, making *drip* sounds every time a tear hit the floor. A sob burst from her lips and mingled with the strangled cries from the invisible little girl.

“You weren’t there when we needed you!” they chimed in bitter tones. “You have no thought for anyone but yourself and now look where you are! A dirty old man begging for scraps in the street. There’s no one who’ll help you now, and you’ve lost all you thought you loved.”

“I—I’m sorry.”

“Sorry can’t help you now,” the mother and daughter shrieked together. “You’re alone.”

Then their shrieks turned into haunting laughter, swirling around him until he didn’t know which was up and which was down.

Harold awoke with a start, sweat beading on his forehead despite the freezing cold. He looked around the room, shaken. Then he glanced at the sink, with its *drips*.

“I’m alone,” he whispered, slightly relieved. “I’m alone.”

Then he re-positioned himself against the wall and fell back into a troubled sleep, where he was drowning in Cecilia’s tears and Sarah’s shrieks. All the while the *drip, drip, drip*-ing of the faucet continued, tapping out a slow beat that resounded throughout the room with cruel clearness against the sink.