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Not Surprisingly I Awoke in the Night

James Mechem

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She didn't speak again for hundreds of miles. It was dark. She continued to drive. Finally she stopped. "Be ready at seven in the morning if you want to go on with me."

But I overslept.

The story of my life.

Four New Stories & a Last Word / James Mechem

All my early stories used to be written out of the sexist bag. That was my whole bag of tricks . . . I've still got a lot of sexist stories that I have to peddle . . . I guess I'm going to have to let them go even though my attitude has changed . . . written long ago . . . but how can I explain that to people . . . they don't know my attitude has changed . . . too bad . . . I can't be concerned . . . (from a letter to the editor)

Not Surprisingly I Awoke in the Night

Not surprisingly, I awoke in the night so chilly that I had to drag up the blankets I had pushed earlier to the foot of the bed.

The woman in the kimono was still asleep on the floor but the fire was out. I didn't want to but I got up and put one of my blankets over her.

I had told her, You can sleep in the bed with me. I won't hassle you. But she said she preferred the floor.

I think I'd have to be awfully tired to sleep on the floor. Maybe she was awfully tired. She didn't wake up when I put the blanket over her.

I couldn't get back to sleep thinking about her. Instead, I got up and began to paw through her luggage.

She startled me out of a year's growth. I turned around and she had taken possession of the bed.

I threw myself down on the floor and fell asleep. The next thing I knew she was bending over me. Was she going to stab me? No. She was telling me to get out.

She had checked with the desk and it was her room not mine.

"But how did you get out? What about the blizzard?"

"They've had bulldozers clearing away the drifts all morning."

"Snowplows?"

“Whatever. Get out.”
“We’ve never been introduced.”
“My name is Onata.”
“What room is mine?”
“I didn’t ask.”
“Will we see each other again?”
“I’m here for a writer’s conference. For three days.”
“Where’s your home?”
“Waikiki.”
“I’m here for the conference too. Perhaps I can share this room with you. Did you mention my name to the desk?”
“I don’t know your name.”
“So they don’t know I’ve arrived. So I can pay you instead of them. And you’ll get your lodging free.”
“Why would you do that? Do you like to sleep on the floor?”
“I thought we could share the bed. I won’t hassle you.”
“That’s what you said last night. What does this mean, your hassle?”
“It’s been the dream of my life to be able to treat a beautiful woman as though she were a person and not a sex object.”
“Why do you have to treat her any way? What is this treatment? Why don’t you just be friends?”
“That’s what I mean. I want to be a beautiful woman’s companion and confidante.”
“Why do you say beautiful woman?”
“You are beautiful.”
“But you make a thing out of it. I thought it was the person you liked.”
“Possessive, huh? You think I’m possessive? You think that’s sexist, to want cherished objects?”
“Yes.”
“What an impasse! I’m not allowed to want my dream of a lifetime?”
“Your dream of a lifetime is a selfish dream.”
“What if you had the same dream, then what?”
“Ah. But I haven’t.”
“But what if you had?”
“I suppose it would be a matter of sharing the same dream. Is that what you want me to say? What time is the first meeting?”
“Well, what about it?”
“No. You go to your own room.”
“I want to be your friend.”
“Why me?”
“Because we spent last night together.”
“Last night you took over my room and I had to sleep on the floor.”

"I didn't know it was your room. Will you be my friend?"

"Of course I'll be your friend."

"Then I won't have to move."

"Do you know martial arts?" she asked me.

"Me?" I said. "No."

"Let's have a physical contest. If I'm stronger than you are then you can share the bed."

"I have a feeling I'm going to get whipped."

"Are you prepared?"

"I don't want to."

"Then go back to your own room."

"I will in a minute."

She stepped back and got into a crouching position. "Get up."

I got up and ran at her. She sidestepped, tripped me and I fell on my face. After a few falls like that, when I was trying my best, believe me, she was convinced that she was the stronger, and she agreed to let me stay if I paid the bill. "Also pay for my board," she said.

"Wait a minute, I didn't say that."

"Or else move out." She smiled politely. The smile was taunting me. She had the upper hand. There was nothing I could do. I thought of rushing her again. But she saw it in my eyes and she was ready for me. "Come ahead," she said with a lilt in her voice.

"OK," I said with a sigh.

"OK what?"

"I want to stay with you at all costs," I said.

"Why?"

"Because I've never known anybody like you and I like what I've learned so far and I want to learn more because I know I'll like that just as much."

"What a fool you are."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You live in a fantasy world. All these theories, desires, wishes."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You put everything into language."

"Don't you do that? Aren't you a writer? What do you write?"

"Of course," she said. "But I don't go around fantasizing my life. I write my stories, I don't live them."

"That's the difference between us."

"One of the differences. The other difference is that I'm stronger than you. That's the one I care about."