

BEDTIME STORY

Written by

Bill Papa

FADE IN:

INT. JENNI'S HOME - DAY

KITCHEN

JENNI LANG (4, slim), sits at the kitchen table in her parent's apartment. She's got a few bites left on her plate. Her father, ED LANG (mid 30's, blue collar worker), sits across from her.

In the background, audio from a television news program in the adjoining living room drifts through the kitchen.

The two eat silently, Jenni studies her father, but says nothing.

He finally notices her, and forces a smile. He gets up, carries his dishes to the sink, and rinses them. His face is weary, his eyes tired.

Jenni pokes at her food. Her attention is diverted to the living room.

Her father moves the rinsed dishes to the dishwasher.

ED
You 'bout done, hun?

No response. He turns back to the table, Jenni's not there.

ED (CONT'D)
Jen? Need your plate.

Still no reaction from her. He walks to the living room.

LIVING ROOM

A medium sized room with modest furnishings.

Jenni stands a foot from the television, as though she's inspecting the screen for dust.

A video of military action in Iraq shows combatants in a firefight with U.S. troops. The REPORTER provides commentary.

REPORTER (O.C.)
..and as Rebel forces continue to
intensify their attacks in
Baghdad..

The screen suddenly goes blank.

ED

Jenni, you don't need to be
watching that stuff.

He returns the remote back to the chair-side table.

ED (CONT'D)

The nightmares.

Jenni continues to stare at the dead screen. She sees her reflection, and touches it with her fingers.

JENNI

I just wanted to see if..

INT. JENNI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

JENNI'S BEDROOM

A typical room for a princess-loving preschooler. A bedside table by the bed, a chest of drawers opposite the bed.

In her pajamas, Jenni is tucked in her bed. Beside her rests a neon blue teddy bear. On her other side, her father sits next to her, and reads from a children's book.

ED

..then the storm finally came to an end, the sun broke through the clouds, and all was well. And they all lived..

He pauses, looks at his daughter. Jenni realizes her dad is waiting for her to finish the story.

JENNI

Happily ever after.

ED

Happily ever after. The end.

Her father closes the book, leans over and gives Jenni a kiss on her left cheek.

ED (CONT'D)

For me..

He follows with a second kiss to the right cheek.

ED (CONT'D)

.. and one for Mommy.

He stands up, walks around the bed toward the lamp.

JENNI
Daddy? How many more days?

The question deflates him.

ED
One less than last night, hun.

He turns off the lamp, and walks to the door.

ED (CONT'D)
And one more than tomorrow.

He struggles with how to depart the room.

ED (CONT'D)
Night-night.

JENNI
Night-night.

ED
Night-night, Bluebear.

Jenni watches as he leaves the room and walks down the hall into the living room. After a few seconds, she moves her teddy bear out the way, and gets out of bed.

She tiptoes to the hall, and spies her dad wiping his eyes. He sniffles, and stares at the wall.

Jenni returns to her room, and sits upright on her bed. On her bedpost rests a knit ski cap with the letters "USA". She puts it on, pressing it down snugly, and clutches her teddy-bear.

She takes a deep breath, then exhales. Another deep breath, and finally a third. She jumps up.

EXT. STREETS OF BAGHDAD - DAY

Bright sunlight saturates the deserted street. Wafts of smoke drift past. RATA-TATA-TAT of automatic weapons in the distance.

Jenni stands on the sidewalk, still in her pajamas and knit cap, she holds Bluebear.

She takes a moment to get her bearings. The environment and atmosphere intimidate her. She notices a round pink traffic sign across the street, with a large purple arrow. She moves along the sidewalk in the pointed direction.

Twenty feet ahead, on a bench sit three older middle-eastern men. They wear white robes, head-dress, and have thick, black beards. With dark eyes, they leer at Jenni as she approaches.

She gives them a wide berth as she walks by. Twenty feet past, she cuts back to the sidewalk.

In the street beside the sidewalk lay four bodies, dried streaks of blood stain their dirty rebel uniforms.

She slows, watches for movement, then quickens her pace past the bodies. She looks back to make sure they're still there.

The gunfire is louder and more intense. She approaches an intersection marred by a medium-sized blast crater.

At the crater's edge sits a mangled minivan on its side. On the sidewalk corner, a large pile of golf ball sized rocks.

She stops at the pile, grabs a rock, and throws it into the crater. The rock comes to a rest on the closer side of the crater, beside a few hundred similarly sized rocks.

She looks back at the pile.

JENNI
One less than last night.

She notices another round sign pointing straight ahead. The smoke is thicker in that direction, but she continues.

The sound of jets, distant explosions, and heavy gunfire continue to increase in volume, now quite loud.

Jenni arrives at the crosswalk of another intersection, and stops. The red "don't walk" sign flashes intermittently as she waits impatiently.

Finally the white "walk" sign flashes. In that instant, all sounds of war cease. Soft sounds of birds chirping as Jenni slowly crosses the street.

Once across, she looks back as the flashing light counts down: "5", "4", "3", "2", "1". The red "don't walk" light returns, and the sounds of battle raging around her return.

Jenni's pace quickens. She sees another round sign, this time with an arrow facing right. She turns to follow.

An EXPLOSION rattles her, and she drops Bluebear.

Voices in the distance, shouting angrily, increase in volume as they approach. Panicked, Jenni ducks into a storefront, crouches down and watches out the window.

She notices Bluebear, still on the sidewalk, and as she starts to retrieve him, the shouting gets closer. She crawls back inside the store.

Two armed MILITANTS with rifles rush past the store. One kicks the bear as he passes by.

JENNI (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Bluebear!

Jenni watches them continue to run, and goes to rescue her bear. As the men move further away,

MILITANT 1
Ha! Stupid bear in the street!

After a few more steps..

MILITANT 2
Bear? A blue bear?

MILITANT 1
Yes, but why?

They stop.

MILITANT 2
Idiot! Little girl has blue bear!

They look back to see Jenni, who stands on the sidewalk as she watches them. She SCREAMS, and scampers in the other direction. The men give chase.

Frantic, Jenni sees another round sign, left arrow. She turns left, continues to run. Another left arrow directs her behind a dumpster.

Jenni crouches low as the men approach.

MILITANT 2 (CONT'D)
Little girl, where are you?

They see the dumpster, signal each other to approach it.

MILITANT 1
We know where you are, little girl.

Jenni closes her eyes, holds Bluebear tightly.

One of the men motions to the other toward the inside of the dumpster. They raise their rifles high, point them down into the dumpster, and spray the inside with bullets.

Jenni flinches at the gunfire, and takes off down the street. At the dead end, an arrow to the right. Now at a short distance, the two men notice her, and resume the chase.

She looks back, sees them coming, and screams. Another sign leads her onto a wooded walking trail.

MILITANT 2
Get her, before it is too late!

She continues to run, not looking back. Ahead of her, the woods open into a clearing, and with it, a parking lot. She runs into the parking lot.

The two men reach the clearing, pause, and spot her. Militant1 raises his rifle, aims, has her in his cross hairs, his finger on the trigger.

MILITANT 2 (CONT'D)
NO!

Militant2 yanks the gun barrel down.

MILITANT 2 (CONT'D)
No! You see where she is?

EXT. US ARMY BASE - DAY

A large base with a heavily-fortified barbed-wire fence sits at the other side of the parking lot. Several soldiers guard the perimeter. At the gate, a "US ARMY BASE" banner.

Jenni looks back at the two men, who watch her with disgust. She slows to a walk as she reaches the entrance. The guards smile as she strolls through the checkpoint, into the base.

Jenni continues, and looks at the soldiers inside. Beside a jeep, three soldiers in army fatigues and boots stand, engrossed in the happy conversation.

Jenni approaches one of the soldiers from behind. She drops her Bluebear, and tugs on the soldier's sleeve. Jenni's MOTHER turns around.

MOTHER
Jenni-Poo! Oh my God!

Jenni's mother grabs and lifts Jenni into her arms in one fell swoop.

The two embrace tightly for several seconds, then her Mother starts peck-kissing her.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Mwaa, mwaa, mwaa..

Jenni delights in the moment, and kisses her mother back.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Oh honey, I have missed you.

JENNI
Me too.

They look at each other for a moment.

MOTHER
So how are things at home, honey?

JENNI
A little better. But dad's cooking
is still...

Jenni smiles, rests her head on her mother's shoulder, places her arms around her mother's neck, closes her eyes, and lets her body go limp.

JENNI (CONT'D)
Love you, Mommy.

Her mother sways her back and forth.

MOTHER
Love you too. I love you so much.

Another squeeze. The moment of togetherness lasts a few seconds more.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Night-night, Jenni-poo.

Jenni's smile grows broader. She lifts her head to study her mother's face for a few seconds. Her mother looks at her quizzically. Jenni laughs.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
What?

JENNI
It's been so long. I just want to
rememorize your face.

Her mother smiles. Jenni smiles back, and returns her head to her mother's shoulder. Again, she closes her eyes.

JENNI (CONT'D)
Night-night.

INT. JENNI'S HOME - NIGHT

JENNI'S BEDROOM

The same darkened room, light from the hall illuminates the head of Jenni's bed. Jenni lies atop the covers, the knit cap clings unevenly to her head.

Her eyes are closed, her lips with a hint of a smile. Bluebear rests to the side askew, facing away.

On the bedside table near the lamp sits a picture frame.

It protects the photo of Jenni's mother, in the same clothing as earlier, leaning on the same jeep, with a loving smile.

Below the photo, an inscription on the frame:

"Justine Lang, 9-18-84 to 4-25-2014".

FADE TO BLACK.