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GOOD ENOUGH
BY TOMMY VOLLMAN

 have running dreams. I'm running north on Bowery just below Delancey. I'm always in the left-hand lane pacing along the median at a pretty fair clip, and it's almost spring but not quite so there's this build-up in the gutters around and under my feet: tiny pebbles of asphalt and concrete, salt, and filthy, street-blackened ice chunks.

I'm never running too fast or too slow; I'm always just about right.

There's never any traffic in my dreams; the intersections of the LES are mere ghosts of their real selves. It's always morning and not awfully cold, and my breath streams from my slightly-open mouth in a sort of broad, silvery haze. My dream breath isn't smoke, but it could be.

I'm running through the kind of pinkish, amber-blue light that Philip Roth wrote about. It's the kind of light that you'd swear was responsible—more so than calculus or any sort of dark magic—for suspending the heavy bridges that unapologetically splice the East and Hudson. It's the kind of light that graces stark brick and vast, stone buildings with a sort of fraudulent confidence, a charge to not only challenge but push back gravity's dominion in a desperate effort to recover precious millimeters seemingly lost in the deepest, darkest hours of night.

Everything in these dreams is still, save for me.

I want to hate or at least fear these running dreams, but try as I might I simply can't do either on account of their fragile beauty, which makes me wonder if art is really anything at all or just something people imagine because without art what would anyone stare at or swear at or cry in front of or love?

I don't run in real life any more since the actual thing leaves me so splendidly unsatisfied when compared to my dreams.

I don't know what I'm doing or where I'm headed in these dreams, but I don't think that really matters. I've learned when it comes to things like this to simply leave well-enough alone.

I suppose what makes these dreams so terribly inviting is the fact that I don't feel extraordinary in them in any way. I always feel good enough, which is something I hardly ever feel in my waking life.

In my dreams I'm always good enough. I'm okay with the moment and the thought that I don't have to be the best or perfect—I don't even have to be really good. Thoughts of being perfect or the best or really good don't even exist.

In real life, I often feel like a fraud, a want-to-be-but-not quite, a pretty-good-but-not great. Maybe it's these feelings—the ones from real life—that account for the running in my dreams. Maybe I'm chasing something I really need to catch. Maybe I'm chasing something I missed, something important.

I wish I knew what it was.

But the more I think about it, the more I think about the bottom of the tenth, World Series, Game 6, October 26th, 1986. The score was deadlocked at five with two outs and Mookie Wilson at the plate; Bob Stanley was on the mound. A 3-2 count had Ray Knight on the move from second as Wilson slapped a grounder up the first-base line.

Baseball mythology will forever have it that Wilson's ground ball should have been routine, but in those types of instances, routine doesn't exist. It's those types of instances that prove each and every moment counts. And moments, after all, are simply segments of time (a fake and fraudulent construction in and of itself) parsed out and sewn into the wide and varied quilt of memory where they hold only an applied importance. At their core, they're only moments and no one has to be perfect in them or even exceptional or great or whatever.

You're not as good as me.

Moments like the one in the bottom of the 10th, October 26, 1986, make it clear that none of us has to be anything but good enough. And if we show up and really believe that a moment is simply a moment and nothing more, then we can't help but be good enough since that's all we really know how to be anyway.

Mookie Wilson fought off Bob Stanley's pitch the only way he knew how. In that moment, Mookie Wilson wasn't exceptional; he wasn't even great. By all intents and purposes, the swing he took and its resulting ground ball were remarkably unexceptional except for the fact that they weren't because they were good enough. They were precisely what they needed to be and only what they could have been: they were good enough for that particular moment.

And that's all I ever wanted to be: good enough.

Nearly four years to the day after Mookie Wilson slapped that dribbler past Bill Buckner, I totaled the hand-me-down Plymouth Horizon I drove to high school. It was a charcoal grey hatchback with a four-speed, manual transmission that popped out of gear nearly every time I pushed the engine past 4000 rpm. I'd wrestle the stick-shift so fiercely on the freeway that by the time my 40-minute drive to school was over my hand, wrist, and arm were nearly numb.

I buried that car in the back of a Dodge Caravan on a slightly wet and slick afternoon.

Somehow (and I still don't know how) my dad was there before the cop finished writing out my citation. He stood, dad-like, in that windbreaker he always wore—the one my mom said was from all of us when she gave it to him on Father's Day—and shook his swollen finger at me as tiny bits of spit gathered at the corners of his mouth. I tried to pay attention to him, but I couldn't because I kept thinking about that windbreaker and how when he took it out of the box, I swore he hated it. But how could that have been since he wore it all the time? The only thing I could think was Was I wrong now or was I wrong then?

Still, my dad carried on and on until he didn't, and then he ended with one triumphant, final statement. "You're not," he spat, "as good as me."

After that the two of us just stood there silent and stupid for what seemed like forever until I finally forced my eyes to meet his. I squinted hard because I was afraid of doing something else (and I sure as hell wasn't going to do that) because in that moment all I really wanted to do was break the entirety of the world across his face.

He'd have never understood it, though. He'd have never understood that I didn't want to be as good as him. He'd never have understood that all I ever wanted to be was good enough.

This car isn't going to stop.

But now, almost 30 years after that, I've got ahold of my six-year-old son, and I sure as fuck better not let go because traffic is whizzing both ways on the cross street, and I know from driving that street at that very same time of day that those drivers can barely see me, and they sure as hell can't see my 50-inch-tall son. My hand is gripping his hand tighter and tighter, and I'm thinking I have to be careful not to break it, but I'm still holding it as if my life depended on it, since it does. And I'm pretty sure now that I'm wrong, this car isn't going to stop, so I'm wondering what it is I'm going to do since it's probably more dangerous to go any farther out into traffic than it is to just roll onto the Camry's hood, which is what I did the other time I got hit by a car except that time I was on my bike and didn't have ahold of my six-year-old son's tiny hand.

I have to make a decision about what to do, so I pull my son by the hand because I need to keep him safe since that's what I told him I'd do, always, while he was lying there in that weird-ass, plastic hospital crib. He was less than 24 hours-old and had on a pair of headphones that reminded me of the ones the nuns always put on me for the hearing tests I failed. In that darkened room, I whispered past those absurdly large headphones I love you more than anything, which sounds ridiculous but believe me, it's true, and I will always keep you safe. Always.

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But I never thought what I said to him would be a lie. I never planned it to be. But now this car isn't stopping, and what's worse, I can feel myself losing the grip on my son's hand, and I swear I'm not going to be able to live with myself after this.

And then the car stopped.

The driver saw us, and the car stopped. He saw us late, but he saw us. He stopped after his bumper hit me but before it hit my son. He saw us in time but not before I lost the grip I had on my son's hand. He saw us and so he or somebody else didn't kill us. And when he got out of his car, he was crying because he knew what could have happened in that moment.

He cried because of what didn't happen.

But what had happened was that I lost the grip I had on my son's hand, the grip I thought I'd always hold. I wasn't good enough. I didn't have to be perfect or exceptional or better than my dad or anything like that. All I had to be in that moment was good enough and I wasn't.

The running dreams always end the same way; they end with me standing in the middle of the intersection at Bowery and Delancey as traffic suddenly swirls around me as if instantly turned on by a hidden spigot or switch. And there, in all that traffic, I feel like maybe I actually was good enough in that moment with my son. Maybe he and I walked away from that because I was good enough. Maybe I didn't actually lose my grip. Maybe it was something else. Maybe what happened was exactly what needed to happen. And maybe that's precisely what it means to be good enough.

Maybe the hardest part about actually being good enough is accepting the fact that you are good enough, which seems strange or backwards so I'm having trouble accepting it.

But maybe that's it.

Maybe that's being good enough: being exactly what you need to be in a moment, which of course, is the only thing you possibly ever can be.

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I'm a Milwaukee, WI-based writer, musician, and painter. I've written a number of things, published a bit, recorded a few records, and toured a lot. In 2016 my short story Jimmy was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. In 2017 my story Boots was nominated for the Best of the Net Sundress anthology. I've had stories published in Sky Island Journal, Two Cities Review, Palaver, Pithead Chapel, Gris-Gris, and Per Contra. I have some black-ink tattoos on both arms and I really like Kurt Vonnegut, Two Cow Garage, Tillie Olsen, Greg Dulli, Tom Colicchio, Willy Vlautin, and Albert Camus. I'm working on a novel titled Tyne Darling, and released a record These Ghosts in November of 2016. I have a follow-up record slated for late-2018. I currently teach English at Milwaukee Area Technical College and prefer (if I'm honest) to write with pens poached from hotel room cleaning carts.

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