

Carpet

Once there was a carpet rolled up among many great stacks of rolled-up carpets in a giant dusty warehouse in a grimy dingy area of the city where blocks of buildings sat and collected soot while cars coughed by down the street. The carpet rustled its tassels and tried to fidget out a bit from the steel skeleton that housed them all. Goodness, thought the carpet. If I could just get but a bit of light! High above, set in the ceiling of the warehouse, a grease-streaked window filtered a few streams of grey. The manager of the warehouse, a perpetually dark-clad man named Moostrakis, thought that it was best for the carpets to get very little light so they'd never fade. Because he was primarily interested in selling carpets and never really got to know them on a personal level, he couldn't know that most of them lived dreary, frightened lives in his cavernous warehouse.

Moostrakis's office was well-lit and adorned with artifacts from around the earth. In the corner was a gilded globe that tinkled merrily if one spun it, and hanging from the wall were all manner of glittering tapestries; colorful posters made proclamations in all the languages of the world. Moostrakis was on the phone. "Very good," he said. "I've got just the thing. The den, you say? Fabulous." He twirled a corner of his fat moustache. "Why of course, I can deliver just this afternoon!" He hung up the phone, trudging happily out of his office. He gave the globe a spin as he passed, and it sang to the carpet on the floor of his office after he left.

In the gloom of the warehouse, a square of light spread. In silhouette was the stout form of Moostrakis. As he'd never bothered to install lighting in the warehouse (he considered this dangerous), he had to navigate the towering racks of carpets by hand-held illumination. He struck a match in the dusty air and lit an oil chalice from Khazakstan, a gift from a carpetmaker there. The lamp shimmered in its own light. A long way down the corridor before him, Moostrakis beheld a sight that astounded him. One of the carpets was lying, still rolled, on the floor. For a moment, an image came back to Moostrakis, one of his childhood in Greece during the civil war, when he would bring water to his mother the nurse, as she tended wounded fighters in the drafty makeshift hospital. Once he nearly stumbled over a feverish soldier who'd slipped from his bunk and thrashed on the floor, exposing a black gangrenous leg. The child Moostrakis had dropped his pitcher of water, which soaked into the floorboards as the man ceased floundering and became still, and then pale.

Moostrakis went to the carpet on the floor. In the light of his chalice, he could faintly see red and orange lines, diamonds, criss-crossing patterns woven by foreign hands. He knelt by it. Trembling, he touched it where it lay still. No carpets moved themselves from within the gigantic stacks! Suddenly Moostrakis was aware of the looming towers, thousands of carpets lurking silent above him. He caught his breath and rushed out from the warehouse. A minute later, two workers from the warehouse dock came in wielding flashlights whose beams crawled over the carpets. They found the carpet on the floor and fastened their lights on him. After a glance at one another, they picked him up and carried him, sagging, out to the truck, where he was once again packed in the dark. They delivered him to a bright room soaked in warm light that bounced softly off deep wood fixtures and settled into his hues. Occasionally a cat without claws came and nestled upon him, purring.

The carpet never forgot the drab warehouse or his thousands of bretheren, and he never knew that after his escape, Moostrakis had, for a reason he did not fully

understand, installed soft, undamaging lights in the warehouse, and an air filter as well. After that, when he went in to select a purchase, he felt a twinge of gratitude hit him, from somewhere, he knew not where. It came from above, hit him where his shoulders met his spine, and shivered down his fat red legs.