

## One Door Slams by Wendy Lippmann

If we pay attention, life offers daily lessons in opening to grace. Sometimes they come in a whisper and sometimes they come in a slam.

I live in a bright, quiet (by city standards) apartment at the rear of the building, on an alley. The backstair access to the building abuts the southern walls of my place and the common entry has a heavy grated steel gate on a sprung hinge. Unless you close the door very deliberately, holding onto the handle until the gate is entirely shut, the closing clang is so loud and metallic that sometimes my dishes shake and the whole apartment seems to reverberate. One time a painting fell off the wall, just like during the earthquake a few years ago. I have never gotten used to the sound. It rattles me. We've posted reminders near the gate to shut it softly, and most people do. Even I have inadvertently slammed the door when my hands are full, taking the recycling out, and I just can't grab the handle fast enough before that whole door just SLAMS.

But the slams that make my whole body clench and my mind seethe with irritation are the ones that wake me in the middle of the night. These happen with some regularity when a caretaker for a very elderly, bedridden resident on the third floor leaves and another caretaker comes on duty. The shift change seems to be at 4:30 a.m. This has been going on for years. The elderly woman, who I've only seen twice in the eight years I've lived here, is a ghostly presence, so frail, skeletal, somehow alive, receiving 24-hour care. You'd think her condition would soften my irritation about the carelessness or ignorance her caretakers show in letting the door slam, but like I said, the sound reverberates into the stairwell, my walls, my brain.

Until yesterday. I came home in the afternoon to the back entryway and there was one of the caretakers and the old woman in a wheelchair, at the gate. I said hello and went in, asking perfunctorily

whether he needed any help. And then I could hear, SLAM, that he was carrying her in his arms up the stairs, three flights. And then I peeked out the window a few minutes later and saw him retrieve the wheelchair and, SLAM, carry it up the stairs, three flights. In that moment my irritation melted, my heart opened and I heard the slam with a feeling of love for him and the old woman and anyone else who ever slams the door again because their hands might be busy and full of love, or groceries, or the laundry, or my old, dying body.