

I Think I Finally Figured It Out

By Scott Cimarusti

I think I finally figured it out.

It all has to be a dream.

It has to be.

It came to me this morning—like a thunderclap on a cloudless day.

I don't know why I didn't think of it before... It seems so simple to me now.

What other explanation could there be for how everything in my life has gotten so out of control?

You want to know how I figured it out?

I was lying in bed, listening to my clock radio. My alarm had just gone off, and instead of waking to a familiar song from a distant time that might have conjured up bittersweet memories of a lost love or the carefree summer days of my youth, I was forced instead to listen to yet another faceless morning show team blather on about the latest celebrity gossip that passes for news these days. I had just slammed my hand down on the SNOOZE button when it hit me.

This was just another dream—similar to the one that had just been interrupted by my alarm clock...something about flying over the ocean (except not in a plane, but more like a bird) and watching silver dolphins arcing out of the crystal blue water below me. I never got around to finding out how I was able to fly, but that seemed of little consequence now that the dream was over.

As I sat up, blinking owlishly in the gray light of the early morning at the vague hump of my husband's snoring form next to me, I realized that I couldn't really be awake; I must have shifted from one dream to the next. Except this time, it was back to the same one I keep having lately—so often in fact, that in some ways it seems like it's been going on for years now; though I can't even be sure of that, either—it's so hard to get an accurate sense of time anymore.

But unlike the dream of flying over the ocean, this dream is nowhere near as exhilarating. Though not quite a nightmare in the literal sense, it still has elements that remind me of the bad dreams that used to haunt me when I was a little girl. Except this time, it's not some faceless boogeyman or slimy monster with gleaming fangs and claws dripping blood that chases me down dark hallways and backs me into a shadowy corner right before I wake up. The monster who stalks me in this dream is someone who I think is supposed to love me.

Or at least, I think he *used* to love me.

Sometimes, I even get the sense that he and I were once happy together. But as I descend further and further into the depths of this dream, it becomes harder and harder for me to connect to those feelings; especially when I see what appear to be fresh bruises on my arms—or even worse, the ones on my cheeks or my neck that I can't conceal with long sleeves.

But it's not always the visible bruises that are the most painful, I've found.

I'm assuming this man lying next to me is still supposed to be my husband—though there are precious few similarities between him and the doe-eyed prince in a silky black tuxedo who once slipped a gleaming band of gold on my slender finger while my family and friends looked on with smiling faces. (I'm beginning to think that image must be from one of my other dreams.)

If these two men *are* indeed the same person, then some witch has cast a spell on the prince I once knew and transformed him into the demanding, hurtful, and vindictive ogre that now lurks in the shadows, devouring my hopes and bludgeoning my spirit. Though this dream is considerably more vivid than my childhood nightmares, the monster in it still reminds me of a character in a bedtime story that I must have heard as a child; the one about the troll that lived under the bridge and threatened the Three Billy Goats Gruff.

I also get the feeling that I have been a prisoner of this man/troll's rage for quite some time now, though I cannot accurately determine just how long—like I said, the passage of time in dreams is difficult to determine.

This prison to which I am confined is not one of iron bars or walls of stone, though. In fact, one could say that it is partially of my own creation. I have trapped myself here out of my own design; and I dare not attempt escape, for if I do, I'm desperately afraid this man/troll will eclipse the last beacon of light and hope that I have left: the little girl with the magic smile and kaleidoscope eyes (like in the Beatles song).

I can't abandon her and leave her alone with him—I won't. Even though this is all just a dream, it is still unthinkable to imagine him doing to her what he does to me.

If this were a happier dream, the little girl could be my daughter—would be my daughter. But that can't be; a sublime creature such as she could never have been borne from one as pathetic and worthless as I am.

Which is why I'm starting to think that the girl is actually an angel.

All I have to do is look into her eyes and see her smiling back at me, and I feel as if my soul has been lifted from the depths of my abyss—even if only for a moment.

I'm really going to miss her when this dream is over.

But if she is indeed an angel, she should have no problem finding me once I finally wake up for real.

And as I mentioned earlier, I think I've finally figured out how to do that.

You know how in your dreams, when you fall from a high place, you jerk awake right before you hit the ground?

I think this may be the secret to waking up for real for once—and not just ending up in yet another dream.

I can't believe my husband (the man/troll) is still asleep—I thought for sure he would have woken up when I opened the creaky bedroom window that he never bothered to fix (and after one of our "discussions", I stopped asking him to).

God, it's chilly out here. I never realized this ledge was so narrow—but then again, I've never stood out here on it before. I've almost lost my balance twice already—though if you really think about it, it seems kind of silly to worry about that in a dream.

The brick is rough and scratchy on my bare feet; the texture of it almost reminds me of the sidewalk by my house when I was a little girl. Stepping out of the inflatable pool in the front yard onto the cool, prickly grass, then dashing up the front walk, hopping from foot to foot so that neither one would be in contact with the searing hot concrete for too long. But it was all worth it for that dewy glass of ice-cold lemonade and a tender kiss from mom...

I should have thought to put socks on. Luckily I won't be out here too much longer.

God, look at all the traffic down there...an endless parade of my little brother's Matchbox cars all lined up on the front walk (except I won't step on any of these, with their jagged metal corners).

And the sidewalks are almost as crowded as the streets—people swarming and scrambling around frantically like ants in the hot sun. Some of them have stopped to look up and point at me. I wouldn't have thought that anyone would have noticed me all the way up here on the fourteenth floor. But I guess we're all the stars of our own dreams, aren't we?

Hello...yes, I can see you all down there.

Thank God I'm wearing underpants—I bet they can see right up my nightshirt with every gust of wind. Maybe they can, because now a small crowd has gathered right below me. I don't know what they all look so dismayed about—they must know that I'll wake up before I hit the ground and this will all be over with.

Finally.

Hey—I think I see the little girl with the kaleidoscope eyes down there—the angel, I mean. I was hoping I would see her again before I woke up.

Wait a minute—she can't be down there; she should still be asleep in her bed down the hall from my room back in the apartment...

Oh, who knows—these dreams never make any sense anyway.

God, I hope I see her again after I wake up.