

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.

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.

What other explanation could there be for how everything got so screwed up?

You want to know how I figured it out?

Easy.

I was lying in bed, listening to the steady stream of innocuous drivel spewing forth from 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 the pointless blather of yet another faceless morning show host droning on and 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; like the one that had just been interrupted by my alarm clock—something about flying over the ocean (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 colorless 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 again to the recurring one that I seem to be having all the time lately—so often in fact, that in some ways, it seems like it's been going on for years now; but 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 one 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 bogeyman or a slimy monster with gleaming fangs and claws dripping with blood that chases me down dark hallways and backs me into a shadowy corner. The monster who stalks me in this dream is someone who I think is supposed to love me.

At least, I'm pretty sure he did love me at one time—in fact, I even get the sense that he and I were once very 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 face and neck that I can't conceal with long sleeves. Still...if only the visible bruises were the most painful....

All I can really be sure of now is that neither of us is happy anymore. This man—who I'm assuming must still be my husband (though there are precious few similarities between him and the doe-eyed prince dressed in a silky black tuxedo who once slipped a gleaming band of gold on my slender finger while my family and friends looked on, beaming...I'm starting to think that scene must be from a different dream)—this man has somehow transformed into a demanding, hurtful, and vindictive creature who lurks in the shadows, devouring my hopes and bludgeoning my spirit. In some ways, he reminds me of a character in a bedtime story that must be from my childhood—the one about the troll that lived under the bridge and threatened the Three Billy Goats Gruff...(that's another reason I know this is all a dream, you see—trolls don't really exist).

I also get the feeling that I have been this man's prisoner 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 I am confined to is not one of iron bars or walls of stone; it is one 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 he will eclipse the last beacon of light and hope that I have left: the little girl with the kaleidoscope eyes (like in the Beatles song) and a magic smile. I couldn't leave her alone with him. Even though this is all just a dream, it is unthinkable to imagine him doing to her what he does to me.

If I didn't know better, I would think that the little girl is my daughter—but that cannot 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 really an angel (as “real” as a dream can be, I mean). 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.

But if she really is an angel, I'm sure she'll still be able to find me once I finally wake up for real.

And 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 wake up just before you hit the ground and go splat? Well, I've heard people explain this phenomenon as a safety mechanism employed by our brains. From what I understand, our sleeping brains and bodies would respond to the stimuli in our dreams as if they were real—we would twirl and pirouette on stage like a ballerina, swing our arms as if they held the bat that hit the World Series-winning home-run, or whatever—except that while we dream, our brains release some sort of muscular inhibitor to prevent us from hurting ourselves in the real world as our bodies act out our dreams. Even so, the theory goes that if within the context of a dream, we were to actually hit the ground after a high fall, our bodies in the real world would still react accordingly as if we really did fall from a high place and our slumbering bodies would die of shock from the perceived trauma. I don't know for sure if this is true, but I seem to recall reading something about an experiment done on cats where scientists disabled this mechanism that suppresses motor functions during sleep. From what I can remember, the cats got up and stalked imaginary prey or played as if they were awake; but according to the brainwave monitors, the cats were fully immersed in REM sleep. (Again, I can't be one hundred percent certain of the validity of all this—after all, this is coming from someone who has been stuck in dream after dream.)

Anyway...like I said, I think I've figured out a way to wake myself up for real this time—and not end up in yet another dream.

This dream seems to be going OK, though, for the moment...I can't believe my husband is still asleep—I thought for sure he would wake up when I opened the creaky bedroom window that he never bothered to fix, and after one of his "discussions", I stopped asking him to.

God, it's chilly out here. And 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 now—though if you think about it, it seems kind of silly to worry about that now.

The brick is rough and scratchy on my bare feet; the texture of it almost reminds me of the sidewalk leading to the house where I grew up. Stepping out of the blow-up pool in the front yard onto the cool grass, then dashing up the front walk, hopping from foot to foot so that neither of my feet would be in contact with the searing hot concrete long enough to hurt. But it was all worth it for that frosty glass of ice-cold lemonade and a tender sweet 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...and endless parade of my little brother's Matchbox cars all lined up on the front walk....

The sidewalks are almost as bad—swarming with people scrambling around like frantic little bugs in the hot sun. And look—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 see you all down there. Thank God I'm wearing underpants—I bet they can see right up my nightshirt every time the wind gusts. They must, 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 down there—the angel, I mean. I was hoping I would see her again.

Wait a minute—she should still be asleep in her bed down the hall from my room....

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

God, I hope she's still there when I wake up.