

THE DREAM

by John King

She was beautiful standing there in silk while a gentle breeze waved at me in the soft folds of enticement that encircled her. (I think I bought her that dress but I can't be sure.) I stared at her objectifying away everything else about her - my eyes tempting me with an uncontrolled desire. Did she notice me? She stood there continuing to talk to who knows who - I think her mom. They talked about her taking the car somewhere. She was leaving.

We were standing in two separate worlds to be sure - she and I. And, to be sure, that was nothing new. I saw her that evening - maybe for the first time - staring at her through the mist of my negligence. I had lost sight of her over the years, but now, here she stood, the indescribable image of the woman I fell in love with back when we found each other on a college campus. A friend assured me no one "falls" in love. Love is a growth thing. All I know is that I never saw her this way before. I don't think.

But, as I said, this was nothing unusual. My story was not hers. My life was full of professional dreams and career challenges. Hers was diapers, baby bottles and all things maternal. But now and then our paths crossed as if the fates

sought to re-introduce us to each other. Was this one of those times!?

She busied herself with the mundane. Her world was a silent world of a thousand thoughtful acts gone unnoticed. She busied herself in the shadows away from the peering eyes and minds of a culture in search of an identity, of neighborly neighbors, whom she would never meet. Nothing in her personality shouted "Look at me!" Nothing about her gave one the sense that she was anyone important. But in this moment, with the breezes awakening my senses to her beauty, she was important ...to me.

Her life was far simpler than mine. But I think this is a mistake because a woman's complexity, a wife's love, a mother's devotion cannot be measured. Perhaps, this is why I couldn't see what I was looking at. Perhaps, this is how she disappeared in plain sight. Perhaps, this is why, men need to objectify a single aspect of a woman's person. He simplifies his gaze. He focuses somewhere in her world where he can begin to imagine he knows what he sees. (As untrue as that may be.) He has no education, and no educator, to explain what he cannot analyze but only admire. Whether it is her mind or her body, he can only stare with eyes glazed over in a passionate wonderment of how fortunate he is to be near her.

Beyond this, all else is philosophical chatter, bloviating, nothing said, because it isn't the mind of a man that is awakened, but his heart. I have spent my life counseling others about the importance of love, about the dangers of affairs, about the snare of casual relationships - an oxymoron, to be sure. I cautioned a thousand couples about letting their hurts fester in the silence of an estranged romance. But I heard not a word I said! I forgot that I needed her.

Yet, here she was unknowingly drawing me into her sphere - what do they say? Under her spell. And I wanted to be there.

Where does my story go from here? She is leaving and I cannot get her attention. Yet, I remember a night long ago, when romance was young and innocent and naive, that I was all night with a friend at his work bellowing out my despair, my feeling neglected, until the morning fog arrived - so symbolic of the moment - calling me home. When I arrived home, I found her asleep. I had at the time little doubt she was dreaming of other things and disinterested in where I was or why. But years later in conversation I learned, she knew, she was no more asleep than I.

I recalled this now because she was leaving, and she seemed not to care that I was trying to wave her off this excursion. For reasons I will never know she couldn't pause long enough to give explanation.

But she did smile at me - at least that - effortlessly in my direction, and then, with an absent-minded change of thought turned away again while my feeling of wanting to hold her caused by that look set fire to my soul flashing within me - like fire to straw - consuming all interest in everything else.

"The fire of love stops at nothing - it sweeps everything before it," King Solomon cautions. (MSG Song of Solomon 8:7)

I watched her walk to the car. I watched her leave.

They say that loneliness cannot kill but this is humbug, by definition, self-deceiving, for we baby thoughts and cuddle feelings that should be challenged. I found myself growing content while thinking: she will miss me when **I** leave her! I must learn to live without her? Must I sublimate my longing into other interests? Must I let an old girlfriend and the fond memory of a past acquaintance monopolize my thoughts? Am I jealous of her car!?

How sensible sounding irrational ramblings. How logical my request! How reasonable a man's needs! Here is another pause worth pursuing: What about ...well ...ME? If there is a God, why did He make me this way? Why have hormones and circumstances colluded to bring me to this pain? Why must I miss her so, especially since I know she will soon return? She has left countless times before and returned. This is nothing new.

Ah! But it is! For once, I noticed her!

An entire section of this story is missing. What about her feelings? I forgot to ask. And if I am being honest, it seemed inappropriate of me to guess at them - as I have been all these years of silent reflection and self-pity focusing on all things "me."

But something different must be happening here since I am beginning to recognize things about myself that I would never have admitted to back then. Those regrettable, hurtful reactions in my life that haunt my thoughts, scolding me about parts of a past that needs to remain - just that - past.

I am beginning to think that there are things about her I had never imagined, treasures locked away in a relationship never seriously sought out. And the fact that I am still very much alive to her beauty tells me there is also still hope. There is still time to get acquainted with someone I have wanted to get acquainted with since the beginning of time. I have daughters but she is my little girl, my true princess, who was once that little girl in every real sense growing up in her world that was often cruel and unforgiving. She was that teenager that needed to be loved, then, I showed up. And what difference, dare I ask, did I make?

But all this is too serious now, too analytical, too much pining. Where there is love, there is always a future. My

thoughts, now, are of all the tomorrows ahead, all the opportunities before us to make good the wedding promises, the oath of fidelity every couple repeats without thought or conviction. But I know I said it!

I watched her car turn the corner out of sight. I watched her mom make her exit back indoors, probably, to continue cooking something for later - I surmise. I watched until it was just me alone with my thoughts. I was alone with the breeze that brushed against my cheek to remind me that this moment really happened. I had no place to go and no one else I wanted to see, I was momentarily lost among the trees whispering the hopeful refrain: she will be back.

I lost myself in that vision that night when I seemed to see her for the first time although we had been married for decades - that night when all else was out of focus, emotionally fogged over by the blinding glow of an angelic form. Maybe for the first time - I haven't been keeping score - she seemed to glow while my memories raced to keep up - image after image in recollection of the many times she was always there in my life, always around, always busy, always behind the scene making sure the lights that shine on center stage caught my image in their glare. How important all these years we were to each other...and the arguments, the moments away, the times I flew solo, lied to me.

I awoke. It was all a dream, but not one I wanted to ever forget.

I began to realize that I had just played out in timeless recollection the story of my adulthood - all in a rem sleep moment. Nothing is as real as reliving in night visions unresolved feelings or discovering in dreams those lost memories denied in the daylight. I lay there feeling the ache of her absence.

It was around three in the morning. She lay silently sleeping beside me unaware of where I had just been.

I rolled over in her direction and draping my arm gently over her motionless form, fell peacefully back to sleep.