

Dream Time - I

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not sure what to do w/this - if I fictionalise, the kid may not be credible (even if it's me)

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Dream Time I (draft) Shortly after she'd sent me away at 12, feeling like a good horse or warm buffalo robe, my mother was returning me from a visit at the studio where she lived, to my father's house – we'd not stopped for homemade pie and coffees at the truck-stop as I'd hoped – when she looked over to me, questioning my long, unaccustomed quiet. She was taken aback by my appearance next to her in the passenger's seat. Face pale, looking as if I'd just had a seizure. She later told me it reminded her of petit mals she'd seen (sounded like “petty mauls” to me at the time, unfamiliar with the term). But on me, her “little Zen bee-keeper,” a slight confusion read, to her, as bemusement. She observed that I was obviously pondering some question. A little worried, thinking it might be mothering opportunity, and a little curious, she asked me what was going on. Still disoriented, as if coming out of anaesthesia and not having regained my land-legs, I failed to self-censor. I told her I'd just had this incredibly vivid experience. Not like a movie, but on all channels. Just like being there. At the same time, an observer, a voyeur, but present in all senses. I paused. Well? She prompted. I continued, describing being in a car, the sound and feel of the tires thrumming on the pavement, the cold pouring in through the cracked vent in the window, the sight of the oncoming truck, and how it felt approaching the inevitable collision. Knowing, and accepting in the last instant that I was about to die. Feeling the few seconds stretch into warm infinite rubber bands as the truck passed through me. And then dying. For a fair amount of time. Until the present reasserted itself. “Wow,” she said. I asked her if on the way she'd take me to the used-bread store, our family name for the day-old bakery outlet. Smiling, she agreed and we drove on in companionable silence. About a year later, she died instantly in a head-on crash between her VW Bug and an 18-wheeler, on the same straight stretch of dry winter highway. But going in the opposite direction. She was 33. A few of years earlier, a similar experience, but without the audio-visual effects, had visited me. My grandmother, Oma, and I had been returned to my grandparents' house, while Opa and my brother continued cabin-camping in New York on their own. My brother's and my bickering had finally become too much for him to tolerate, so it seemed best to separate us. This was fine with us girls; we would cook and kaffe-klatsch

together, tell stories and maybe make some art, or gather herbs in the ravine. If I was lucky, she'd teach me more German and drill me on what I already knew. Then they'd return, with all the tension gone. We had been back for a day and a half or so when the phone rang on its stand. As she got up reaching for it, I felt a sense of overwhelming dread. No! Don't answer! I silently screamed as her hand lifted the receiver. "Hallo?" After saying only "Yes?" as if agreeing that she was indeed the person they sought, her body seemed to sink in on itself as she listened. She replaced the receiver gently. My magical thinking was something like this: if only she hadn't picked it up, maybe he'd still be alive. She told me that Opa was dead, in a natural gas-leak, and my brother was taken to hospital in critical condition. She didn't know much more, and wanted to call my father, her son. My premonition, if that was what it was, would not have changed a thing. I later wondered, perhaps thinking magically again, why I hadn't pegged the head-on collision, in advance, as a true about-to-happen thing. As if I could. As if it could have made any difference. Two days after my mother's death, family gathered in from all distant parts on Christmas Eve to honour her memory and celebrate her brief life. We remembered her in stories and displayed her artwork; the poets read and we sang beautifully together in four-part harmonies, or solo a capella, some of her favorite songs. It might have been comforting. She was not there. Not even her ashes. For six months, I had dreams of her being lost. I was ever searching for her through some dream-fog, hearing but never seeing her, on the various levels of flat roofs over my father's house and the attached machine shop. In the way of dreams, the tarred surfaces were magnified in number and size, stretching over far more than the half-block they actually covered between our street and the alley behind. It was always night. I knew I was dreaming, each time, but surrendered to the search. Ultimately, she materialized from the mist, and spoke to me (knowing I was talking to myself) assuring me that she . . . well, probably all the things I felt I needed for closure. The dream stopped. I had another recurrent dream, starting about a year later, again in the passenger seat with her driving, but crossing the bridge over our river. In the way of dreams, it was higher and grander, a full four lanes, hundreds of feet high, much less humble than in real life. I was uncomfortable, because it seemed she drove unaware of the huge screamingly obvious holes, almost as wide as a lane, through which I could see the river stretching far beneath us. The VW pattered on. I got progressively more anxious as she failed to adjust our course; the tires dipped precariously once or twice over the edges toward the chasm below. Now near hysterical with suppressed fear, I called, "Mom!" She glanced over at the outburst, taking her eyes off the road. I always awoke as we free-fell. Troubled, and a little irritated by the repeated imagery, I recognised dream work demanding my attention. Arriving at an analysis, in short work, that not being in the driver's seat represented to me my fear of loss of control, of literally not being in the driver's seat. I thought that just knowing this might banish this dream. About six weeks before her death, she'd attempted suicide, slashing her wrists cross-wise but not deeply, with a machete. Terrified by the reality of the blood and what she'd done, she drove herself to the emergency room. I saw her there, her wrists braced in gauze, before she was admitted for the standard three-day hold. She expressed clearly a desire to live, despite the pain which had led to her act, and seemed more than willing to do the work ahead. She seemed to be in a post-coital glow following her dance with death,

one that bumped up the volume on her love affair with life. In retrospect, she may have entered the dangerous elevation of mood following a long, deep depression. The dreams continued. On further reflection, I sussed out that I was feeling responsible for her death. What if I hadn't yelled out on the bridge? What if I'd not been so explicit about the highway tale? My doubts about my mother's sanity left me with grave occult concerns for my own. Would I eventually and inevitably reap a possible genetic harvest (had she actually killed herself? or was it an accident?) and decided to consider my fate as steered by my own choices and reactions to events. I worked on this for awhile in waking life. While not able to absolutely affect things that happened around and to me, I had control over how I reacted, on what I felt and what actions I might choose to take. I could choose that. I could be in the driver's seat. The dream stopped. I was relieved. Now, I also was hooked. I had evidence, though unverifiable, that my subconscious could poke me, repeatedly begging attention. In sleep, anything on the back burner might, reassuringly, be relied upon to alarm before boiling over. Alarums, indeed. A decade passed. Now in my early twenties, another recurring dream reared its head, but didn't disturb me. This was even more vivid, with a complex plot and back-stories. In the dream, I was a well-educated middle-class Polish-Jewish refugee, in my thirties, in London. Before the War, I'd liked to label myself an anarchist, but really wasn't, this being more for late-adolescent shock value. I'd recently escaped Warsaw's towering heaps of brick after the blitzkrieg. I could remember orphans combing the rubble looking for food or lost mementos of their families, and on first sight of the panzers thinking what does our romantic, antiquated cavalry mean against that? In or near London, I stayed with new friends at the end of a cobble-stone street, a nice neighbourhood visible through the rain-streaked windows of the small but elegant front-facing library where I paced, waiting for a return to action. Any action. I could smell the rain, and hear its thorough Spring downpour drum against the glass and on the metal awning, washing down soot and dust, ever-present in or after the Blitz. Tin-coloured light washing the hardwood and worn oriental rugs. No one else was home. I would attend meetings with others like me at night, and during the day wrote politically to pass the time. I composed poems poorly expressing my grief, and frustration at the inactivity. My closest friend was a Slav of some sort and of minor noble lineage, a count or princeling bankrupting his fortune, working quietly to arrange the salvage of as many people, especially Jews, as he possibly could from the jaws of the Nazi war machine. He had old family business contacts in Switzerland he hoped would help him. Meanwhile, I'd studied diligently to acquire my silk-codes and radio operations techniques. I hoped to be dropped behind the lines soon, probably in Holland or Belgium. That's as much as I ever got. It was the waiting in the rain, pacing. Mind you, at this time, I had no overt knowledge of many of these minute details, at least none of which I was aware. Few of the descriptors applied to me, an American living well below her SES, a recent high-school graduate with no college prospects, who'd only traveled in North America. We hadn't had a TV at home, and although I read a lot, it was mostly fiction and poetry. I'd not yet read anything like this. In my childhood, the War was never discussed by my German grandparents, who emigrated following their War (the one to end all), leaving their families behind and each, a single sister who survived Hitler's Reich. Whether this was due to some sense of propriety, or burdened with an uncomfortable sense of national guilt, I don't know. Maybe

history simply took a back seat to insistent current events. Back then, my War had occasioned Opa to relax his dignified mien and European rules, so Vietnam accompanied us into the dining room on a wheeled cart, lest we miss the constant black and white coverage of carnage, protests and updated largely fictitious body-counts. I'd not yet met my German cousins or contemporary friends who would speak openly about this history. Some had thought the Russians would rescue them, and lived the painful reality of a furious liberation/occupation. We'd covered WW II in sixth-grade, of course, and my fascination with the subject led the teacher of my experimental ed section to permit fairly extensive study . . . for an 11-year-old. And Leo Marx had not yet published "Between Silks and Cyanide," his engaging memoir of his war years about his experience with the code-breakers and -makers at Baker Street and Bletchley Park, where he worked with expatriate agents and ran them in hostile territory. That book would be published almost twenty years hence. Where did all this come from? Maybe I'd absorbed more than I knew. At the time, I was myself at an early adult crossroads – perhaps I'd constructed an elaborate metaphor-drenched synopsis of waiting impatiently for the next stage of my life to commence. Or had my quirky inner radio tuned in some lost frequency from the universal unconscious, someone else's memories? I had no idea, filing the experience under interesting, unknown phenomena for some later consideration. Eventually this dream, too, ceased. I had a lot of one-offs, equally intricate and in Technicolor, but without troubling repeats. I also awoke to music often, sometimes of unknown origin, something different or more, and more beautiful, than the annoying tunes we can't banish. By this time, I'd learned that one aspect of sleep was housekeeping, to consolidate memory, resorting impressions from our day into the stories we tell ourselves. I knew that some of this noise was random, and with the neo-cortex being the home of man-the-story-teller, we were hard-wired to construct something out of nothing. I could enjoy the occasional opus my sleeping brain wrote for me, secure in the knowledge it didn't have to mean anything. About this time, I was returning alone from a condo open-house I'd attended at a friend's request, a long pleasant drive, with the driver's window open just a little to relieve the heat. Traveling at speed, but not over the limit, I went under an over-pass where a large grasshopper was suctioned into my vortex through the gap, from the grasses under the bridge, striking me at 60 mph in the face. I jerked, reflexively turning my head away from the pain, unconsciously turning my body and the wheel. The car went off the road. I struggled for control on the gravel shoulder, painfully aware of the other drivers nearby. Although only seconds passed, adrenalin slowed time, allowing all inputs to be measured and thoughts to congeal, as if I had forever to consider each choice. I passed through the chute made by granite cuts lining this section, not able to slow without losing traction, and saw the long bridge over the gorge coming up. I knew the shoulder would disappear and didn't want to go over the drop. A forceful thought came through. "You are not going to die." And then, curiously, "you've already done that." The cut gave way to a small gentle hill. The cars from my pack had all passed me now. I took my hands off the wheel, content in some eerie trust that things would work out. A passing driver described what he'd seen. The car flipped over four times, slowing itself as it rolled down the hill, landing with the roof crushed and all windows broken, finally coming to rest on both snapped axles. The empty baby-seat had been thrown clear, lying ten yards away on the side of

the road. That part had proceeded at normal pace. A whirl of rotating images and impressions as my ears tried to accommodate the changing vectors. Unencumbered by a seat-belt, my thighs instinctively locked on the steering column (leaving an impression of deep-purple grapefruits), protecting my head from injury. I crawled unharmed – save for bloody, torn nylons – through the inoperable door's shattered glass. I surveyed the formerly boxy old sedan, now transformed into a smoking triangular wedge resembling a surrealist's TR7. Where did that come from ? thinking about the promise, or command, or whatever it had been. Probably my own subconscious, I concluded. But I still couldn't explain the second part . . . so, dismissed it. I could only offer silent thanks to the universe. Serenity drained gradually away, and I got anxious later in the ambulance, remembering that the car was uninsured. And not mine. kmf (RedSonja)