

[PROSE]

## ***The Dream***

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A storm has fought its way into town. Light flashes through the shutters and I snap awake, the roll of thunder humming in the walls. I fear immediately for myself and no one else. My husband is behind me, holding me. Annoyed in his hands, I peel myself from his vice-like grasp, where for so long I found love and security and faithfulness. I am bored with him, complacent and bitter. I cannot remember how to enjoy him. He sighs in his sleep, assuredly dreaming of a rapturous affair as I have been for weeks on end. Without me, he squirms in the bed, finally rolling to the right and pulling one leg up to his chest. I feel the weight on the mattress shift as he moves and I leave my husband's bed for the last time.

I get up while it is still dark. Without second thought, I slink by the rooms of my children, who will wake to a half-empty house in turmoil and confusion. They will not miss me, for I have never been a good mother. The storm outside is quelled momentarily as I fumble through the house, careful to avoid the creaky fifth step. It takes me only a few minutes to gather my things: food, money, clothing, all things I neglected to provide for my children when they needed them most. I spend far too long gazing at the sheets of rain falling silently on the pavement outside. I laugh at the days to come, days of fulfillment and opportunity and enlightenment. My forehead rubs against the kitchen window, and I see my reflection. My hair looks disheveled, my face abnormally aged. Something, it seems, left me long ago.

The room grows cold, my breath fogs the glass and the storm begins to build again, lightning inaudibly blazing the

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dark sky, drowned out by the pounding rain. I am startled when, in a moment of sheer terror, the thunder cracks and two arms wrap around me. My eyes widen and in the reflection of the window, I see my husband standing behind me, disrobed and undignified and wide awake. Startled and speechless, I wonder briefly if he knows of my intended treason, but I soon collect myself and rest firmly on his naivety. He has no idea.

I had a dream, he tells me.

About what?, I mutter uninterested, wishing I had left the night before.

About us. I had a dream that our children grew to be beautiful people, respected and adored. I had a dream that you grew old with me in this house, that you rose in the morning and knew unquestionably that I loved you since the day I committed myself to you. I had a dream that you walked with me in the rain, that you kissed me hard, like you did when we were younger, like you did when you were not scared of the things that scare you now.

Here, my husband began to cry, composed and without facial expression, the way a man does when he is deeply hurt. I felt his breath warm in my ear and hope beating wildly in his chest.

I had a dream that you loved me again.

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