

Marriage never. A baby? No. . . . Never for me. Not now. . . .
 Not ever. . . .
 We Die. . . .

Were we of any good ever? Did we really deserve to live?
 Deserve to live, for What?
 Immortality?

Once I remember struggling through a course at school,
 the teacher says again, "Division by zero is undefined."

Zero— nothingness — infinity. . . .

$\frac{X}{0}$ = Life and Death, the unknown quantities.

The Dream

Helena Marie Boukes

AS SHE sat on the side of her bed, the obsession melted away, drifting into nothingness, leaving in its wake a mysterious awareness of complete peace. For fifteen minutes she sat there, thinking, wondering, dreaming. It had started fourteen years ago.

She and her husband had been driving on the highway, like two separate individuals, immersed in their own thoughts. "Why did he have to drive so fast, passing everyone?" There was no hurry on Sunday afternoon. Now he was going to pass someone else, taking a chance. She never looked at the car they passed, for she felt embarrassed, foolish, rushing along. In desperation she gave up, accepted the situation, and began to rationalize. If her friends knew, they would shake their heads at her philosophy, pretending this was right, to drive as fast as possible. The attempt to be casual about it was her only defense, "Oh well, we have to die sometime." Frivolous, but she refused to nag, no use anyway.

A thought, uncommonly clear, went through her mind: "He has just five more years to live." She sat there, still, looking straight ahead as they sped past another car. The man honked his horn. Her husband cut in quickly. She sighed, and looked calmly at the beautiful scenery beside the open road. The vivid thought was still with her, and she became aware that the words were burning themselves into her mind; sinking into the depths of her subconscious well.

Days passed, sometimes drearily, monotonously, dishes to wash, meals to cook, beds to make. There were children, two little bright-eyed girls, and she smiled as she worked and trained them. Only at night when they were in bed and she was alone while their father worked, her smile faded, she became serious, sometimes cried. The breach widened, the days dragged, her feet felt heavy.

Then help came, encouragement, smiles, laughter and hope. "We

will try again," they agreed. There were picnics, friends, good times. Five years passed quickly.

It was a bright Spring day, just right for a trip. The scenery along the road was beautiful, the trees were lacy with unfolding buds, and pink streaks appeared in the blue twilight sky. A sudden red blur, fringed with orange, consumed her mind, nothing more. She lay stretched across the road; a man kneeling beside her held her hand. Her husband's broken glasses were in front of the stranger's car. The ambulance came quickly; more men carefully lifted them up, and then a month in the hospital for her, a few days for him.

To be able to walk again, to clean the cobwebs out of the registers, sweep and dust; it was good just to be home. But the house was lonely for her, a young widow. At first friends were sympathetic; there were compensations, unexpected surprises, visits, and gifts. Days passed, nights lingered. Then back to the hospital for birth. Her husband never knew he was to have had a son. Now more work, more things to be washed, and problems to be decided; still the emptiness, a void, more sighs, and waiting.

It was a bright day at some old friend's house when renewed hope unfolded. A stranger became a friend, more than a friend, then romance. Now the days were long, and the evenings warm. Friends smiled and nodded their heads, the three children beamed, and once more the family was complete.

Two years passed quickly, pleasantly, happily, old tensions began to fade. Then suddenly, coldly, the old thought revived. "He has five more years to live." Horror! No! Just a recollection—a twisted, ugly stream seeping up from the subconscious well. She laughed, cynically. Impossible! No reason, just a nightmarish memory! Still it persisted, not violently, just slowly, softly, once in a while, and she pushed it aside.

Four years vanished. The children were growing up, there was school and extra lessons. They saved for the future, for college, and a late honeymoon. But the thought continued, secretly, there was no confiding this! It was too ridiculous! She fought it and it grew stronger. In February they would be married seven years, but even before Christmas the thought had crystalized into a consuming obsession. It never left her alone, pursuing her, taunting her, tormenting her. Now she was frantic; she must get rid of this ghost, this childish, foolish, heinous creature, grabbing at her, tugging at her skirts every wakeful moment. She would get rid of it now! She would pray! She had done so successfully in the past, but now there was no relief, no conscious sign of help.

She contemplated another method of attack. "I know," she cried, "A dream! A dream so vivid, so frightening, so real that it will shake this demon off me!"

Breathing deep with her inspiration, she slipped into bed, beside a calm, sleeping husband. She lay stretched out straight, smiling,

rather excited. Inwardly she cried out, almost screamed, "Oh, God send me that dream tonight!"

Sleeping well, she awoke early, and her first thought was to recall the dream she yearned for so. Hopefully she searched her mind; fearfully she refused to give up, she searched again. No luck! Did prayer work? Her spirit sank. Now she doubted, slightly for a moment. "No," she thrust the foreign thought from her. "I do believe, but I can't command! It will happen, something, I'm sure!"

All morning she was dreary, dragging her feet, sighing, pushing at the persistent thought of failure, trying to separate herself from the foreboding evil with some kind of inspiration. None came. Still weary from her burden, she sat on the side of her bed after a short afternoon nap.

"Mother," called the oldest little girl from her bedroom.

"Yes, Dear."

"Oh, Mother, I've been meaning to tell you all morning. I had the funniest dream last night," she laughed brightly.

"What was it, Dear," asked the mother.

Children's dreams were always so boring, dragging on, aimlessly, while there were so many things waiting to be done.

"I dreamed that there was a skeleton loose in the neighborhood. It was chasing everyone," the little girl laughed again. "Then it came in our house and began to chase us."

The mother sat up straight.

"It chased us around and around the house, and we were so afraid because if it caught us, we would die!" she paused.

The mother held her hand on her chest, afraid the child had forgotten the ending.

"Then, the skeleton sort of melted, Mother, on the front room floor, and it had a tag tied to its backbone. I went up to it and read the note."

By now the mother was holding her breath.

"The note said, 'I will go away, but I will return in seven years.'" The little girl giggled, "Wasn't that a funny dream, Mother?"

The mother started breathing again. "Yes it was, Dear."

Seven more years! By then she would be able to shake off the vicious curse. Now the obsession was gone, dissolving into nothingness, leaving in its wake a mysterious awareness of complete peace.