

July 12, 1980

Summer. The grass lawn glares. The trees, huge maples with head-size leaves that should be green scream white above you. The air is close. Nothing stirs. One of these big bugs, the kind you hear and never see, starts to buzz, droning endlessly, scraping at first, then getting louder, til the drilling surrounds you and is no longer a sound but a shroud, too heavy to push off. And when you think you can't take the sound, and the air chokes, and you take big gulps, the stifled feeling reverts to sound, and the sound recedes and the shroud lifts, and the buzz ends up scraping again till it's gone--till it's nothing.

You're five years old again.

You are sitting there in the dirt that sticks to your moist, dewing arms, and you are listening to this noise of noise in early morning, having crept from the house before mom awakes to explore the many wondrous backyard mysteries. Not even your brother has joined you, your brother who shares your many ventures, because mom said don't-go-out-unless-there's-someone-to-watch-you, and you know that, and you know this is the only moment of your day that you have to yourself, when you can dream of Peter Pan and knights and Sleeping Beauty.

And you drink up what you sense with all your senses, the taste in your mouth is that mist which flies up in lazy dirt-clouds under your tennies when you step on the ground, and you stare at sky that should be blue 'cause you don't see clouds but that sky relentlessly blaes white, and the air smells close, so close you hold your breath sometimes, to draw on air inside, and all you handle is dry and dusty and numb. Toys left outside under the playset in that dust feel gritty to your touch. No one could water last night. No one could quench and strengthen the broadleaf plants and bushes, now limp and sullen, that were your castles, cool and silent, your hideaways from heat, your shades from shafts of sun that make you squint from light.

And fuzzy, luminous bugs suspend mid-air on invisible strings before the white expanse of day; and the smell of first strawberries tantalize; and your mouth goes suddenly dry; and He steps into view out of the corner of your eye; and the bug starts to hum, and you start to hum, to drown out the beckoning of His voice...

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Dinnie started. Self-consciously she looked around the cabin of the jet. The two men beside her still gesticulated over a political subject. Annoyed that the nearest man had jostled her to consciousness, she jabbed her elbow into his sweeping arm. He frowned; she smiled. Accident, her look inferred.

Her headphones were still on. She must've dozed to the music of 1940's jazz, channel 2. That explained the dream, she thought.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the captain speaking. In twenty minutes we will be landing..."

The captain's voice had interrupted the music. Dinnie flicked the headphones off but could still hear the voice in the cabin.

"...please fasten your seat belts. On behalf of the crew and myself, we hope you had a pleasant flight and we thank you for flying American."

A general stirring filled the cabin, like murmuring bees, the hum growing to a ~~cre~~scendo by the time the captain clicked off. The movement of retrieving cases and fastening safety belts annoyed Dinnie even more. We're not getting off yet, she fumed inwardly, can't they wait

~~till~~ to get their junk till we've landed? Dinnie wrinkled her brow. That dream must've disturbed her more than she realized. When little things annoyed her, there must be something wrong. The feeling was similar to having little burrs in your fingertips that one can't get out.

What WAS that dream anyway? Oh, yes, the strawberry patch. Behind the old house. She wondered how they called it the old house; her family lived in that house, the second of three, for most of the first eighteen years of her life. Maybe she'd even get to see the old place again.

She hoped Ben, her brother, would drive them through the old neighborhood while she was in town. That would be a kick. Reminded of him, Dinnie wondered if Ben were picking her up from the airport and if he'd be on time.

With two carry-on baggages, one in each hand and her blazer discarded because of the heat, Dinnie lumbered off the plane and walked through the tunnel to the terminal. Ben, a solid figure planted firmly at the mouth of the exit, saw her immediately.

He smiled broadly as she headed for him and gave her a kiss and hug before she could shed her arms of their burden.

"Hi! How are you? How was the trip? Dan couldn't make it, huh?..." Ben plied her with questions to which she answered monosyllabically, distantly. The reason for the family's reunion was not a joyous one.



Lilacs bloomed nearby, the odor still lingering in the cricket-trilling, unmoving night. She was only a block from Ben's place and she needed urgently to brush the beer taste from her mouth.

Get going, Dinnie told herself, you'll sleep good tonight once you're in bed.

(You'll sleep good tonight, just c'mere...)

She startled herself at the sound of the words in her head. She looked around to see if anyone saw her jump. No, no one, she thought, just me, I guess, all alone, as usual, and there's only me to get me to where I have to go.

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"See Dinnie...see what I got?...come see what I have...I'll do something with it...you know what?...Dinnie SHUT UP and listen to me...

"...ten days Dinnie full moon..."Matt's voice, "Remember our bargain Dinnie our secret..."

You're singing very loud 'cause the voices won't leave you alone...HOT...so hot! Sweat clings to your neck and arms and chest...you squint your eyes and shade your forehead...the sun pounds heavily on your head...never hidden by clouds, it was always there, waiting with other forces to bombard you...

"Our secret Dinnie...just c'mere..."

Dust...dust everywhere...in your nose, in your mouth as you sing (scream?) and they sing, and the bug...sings...the childish, tuneless singsong to drown out all other sounds..."Nyah nyah nyah I can't hear you! You're not there! I sing sing sing and YOU LEAVE ME ALONE! Or I'll scream scream SCREAM!..."

And the sounds all fill the air...the coaxing, slimy cooing sounds from both sides of the fence...the high, frightened screeching song of a girl ~~xxx~~ who can't move...the sawing, hammering, yammering buzz of that bug...

"we got the others Dinnie...this here's the last...and then you..."

NO!! I CAN'T HEAR YOU! LALALALALALANANANANANANANANANANONONONONONONOOO!

Dinnie who are you talking to? Dinnie are you okay? Dinnie...

"...you promised Dinnie...you made a bargain...our little secret..."

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Dinnie sipped at the hot, strong coffee, her knees pulled up to her chest, huddling on the kitchen chair. Both Joan and Ben sat across from

her, watching/silently, worry not hidden in their eyes.

It was 4 a.m.

After awhile, Dinnie spoke lowly, ashamed, "I'm sorry."

The couple both visibly relaxed at this, her first coherent statement in 15 minutes. Joan joked, "You were a bit loud this time."

"Guess I should just stop my binges so I can sleep better," Dinnie said.

"Do you remember now what the dream was all about?" Ben started again.

Joan was going to interrupt but Dinnie answered, "Oh, yeah, I always knew, every time it happens."

"How long has it been going on?"

She eyed him sideways, "YOU know."

Joan watched the exchange as Ben replied, "As long as mine, huh?"

Dinnie was grateful that Joan didn't demand what was going on. She had been exposed to Ben's bag of tricks in telepathy for awhile now, and though she didn't pooh-pooh the idea, she knew better than to question it.

"Well, do you have any ideas why these dreams are happening now?" Ben queried.

Dinnie thought a moment, lips barely touching the rim of her coffeecup, and then replied, "You know, one summer about 25 years ago, something hpapened in the backyard of the old house. I think I should know what is was, but somehow I think I blocked it out. I read that the mind is very deceiving that way."

She didn't see Ben and Joan exchange looks. She went on, "Anyway, maybe whatever the powers that be decided that ol' Dinnie better shape up now ...or ~~never~~. Maybe every quarter century some of us poor souls has got to purge, you know what I mean?"

Joan looked a little puzzled but Ben was nodding sagely.

Somehow it seemed likely ~~now~~ now to go on, "You know," Dinnie changed her position in her chair, "Dan and I haven't been getting along too well lately, and it disturbs me. He's the most gentle, kind, considerate man I've ever known. Yet there's something sometimes. I get to harping at him like he's someone else, and I know he's not. And lately I get the feeling maybe it's just me, or someone who's not me, you know?"

Ben and Joan were looking in different directions. Dinnie fell silent. She had said too much. Not exactly a subject to bring up to a newly married couple at 4:30 in the morning.



~~I~~ want some lemonade. her mother asked, as if nothing had happened.

Dinnie wiped the palms of her hands on her jeans. Her mouth did feel dry. The

hot weather had not let up since she arrived in town, and the half-hour drive to her mother's house from Ben's had been sticky and humid.

"Yeah, I'll have some," she relented. As her mother fetched a glass from the cupboard, Dinnie went to the bathroom to splash water on her face.

In the mirror she saw a frazzled head framing a drawn face. She hadn't really slept since her last nightmare, three nights ago. She had spent the days writing, writing madly and once she had finished, she did some research at the library. Her one last point to clear up was found in an old calendar dated 1955. And now to finish up her thesis, she had come to visit her mother.

"Here it is," her mother called.

When she re-entered the kitchen, Dinnie saw a tall glass with ice and filled with lemonade. The backlight caught flecks of lemon floating through the liquid. Next to the glass, a bowl of strawberries stood adorning the table. She approached the plate and picked one strawberry. Holding it to her nose, she took one long, deep whiff.

"You always liked strawberries," her mother smiled then, "No one could get any <sup>from the bush</sup> in the backyard after you got to it, ~~remember~~ remember? The strawberry patch?"

"Yeah," Dinnie echoed, "I remember."

Toying with her fork again, her mother said, "You know, Dinnie, we only thought we were doing right when we had to...punish you. You more than others, you were so headstrong. You did naughty things and it made me so mad..."

"Yes, now remember, can't you?" Dinnie latched doggedly onto the

last part, ignoring what her mother thought to be the crux of this strange talk, "What was the worst thing I ever did? The worst thing you could ever beat me for?"

Her mother winced at one particular word. She looked hurt and confused, "I--I don't remember, hon, really. You did all sorts of kid things. I couldn't watch you all the time."

Dinnie looked defeated. She couldn't pull anything out of her mother now, who kept insisting that she must think well of her parents, she must believe that they did what they thought was right, they weren't bad parents, they weren't, and now that her dad was gone...

Dinnie hushed her mother and rubbed her back. It was no good to stir up unnecessary memories for her mother, especially the disciplinarian ones. Some mothers will always remember that they corrected their children and hadn't felt good about it afterwards.

When everything had settled down Dinnie said she had to leave, meet someone for lunch. Her mother walked her to the door and her parting question was, "When's your leaving, hon?"

"Friday, a week from today," Dinnie replied, her hand on the gate.

"The 20th?" her mother glanced at the calendar near the door.

"Yep," Dinnie added absently, "The day before the longest day of the year."

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