

Brian's Bride

by Dan Tricarico

I had a dream.

“And it was a long dream, as dreams go,” I explained, though she didn't seem to be listening. She fixed herself a drink. “You were in it.”

“I was?” She perked up.

She had been my girlfriend for almost eight months. It was serious as these things go, but nothing ever rings completely true. Not even dreams. When she lowered the volume of the radio, I knew I had her attention.

“Tell me about it,” she said, leaning back in her chair.

“It was a wedding. Your wedding.”

We had discussed marriage before, but that wasn't what the dream was about.

“Go on,” she said.

“What I remember first is thinking how I'd better not be late. I loved you so much I would never forgive myself if I was late for your wedding.”

“For *our* wedding, you mean,” she said.

“No,” I said. For your wedding.” I'd already said it twice and that was painful enough.

“Well, finish,” she demanded. “You always get side-tracked.”

“It wasn't far from where I was--the ceremony, I mean. But you know how in dreams things move so much slower. Sometimes. I remember climbing a long flight of stairs. Yes, the stairs came next. But the stairs were outside. Once I reached the top, I thought I was at a car dealership. Lots of things for sale. Lots of salesmen. For some reason, there were a lot of parachutes around. And all our friends were there. Then I saw the altar and the flowers and the wedding guests.”

Her body shifted in the chair.

“I saw our friends; they greeted me,” I said. “But I couldn't concentrate on their voices. They seemed so faint and far off, and there wasn't much sound. I saw the bridesmaids and the groomsmen next. Then I saw the groom. Suddenly, I didn't want to see you married. You were mine. How could you do this to me? I thought.”

“I hadn't yet,” she said, sipping her drink.

Of all the stories I must have told in the last eight months, it was strange for her to follow this one for any length of time. But I was in the middle of something, though, and I had to see it through.

“Was that all?” she asked.

I couldn't tell if she was bored or merely irritated that I stopped to think.

“I kept telling my friends that you shouldn't be doing this. That I loved you. But they said, ‘Don't worry. She'll marry him, but she'll still be with you. . . You'll see.’ ‘Have faith,’ they said. ‘Have faith.’ So I

waited.”

She rose and crossed to an ailing houseplant that withered on her bookshelf.

The plant was suffering from a lack of sun.

Actually, it was dying.

“Did you dream the wedding?” she asked, fingering a leaf.

Clearly, she was losing interest.

“The ceremony was beautiful, I have to admit that.” I shifted in my chair. Why didn't she ever seem to notice when I shifted in my chair? “But what my friends said didn't make sense.”

“Dreams don't make sense; you know that,” she broke in.

“But I believed them. They were my friends. Then you came out. You were dressed in white--”

“God knows what for,” she laughed.

“At any rate, I watched you exchange vows with Brian Long. I've always hated him.”

She knew that.

“That's just because he ran off with that girl you had a crush on in high school. Oh, what was her name? You've told me a million times.”

“Anyway, I've always hated him. I'm sure that's why he was your husband in this dream. Then before I knew what was happening, it

was all over; the ceremony had ended. You both walked over to me. You said, 'I'd like you to meet my husband.'"

She looked up at me.

"And while I lied there in bed, dreaming this, I could feel this slow, awful realization seeping over my body: It was over. We were finished. You were his. I would never have you again. I sat there and watched you marry a man I couldn't stand, thinking it would be all right when it was over. Thinking you would still be mine. It was beautiful, but it was ugly. I ran away."

There was a pause, both of us realizing that the dream had ended.

"Strange," she said after a minute. Her brow twisted. Wisps of brown hair fell into her face. She stood and headed for the door.

"This isn't leading anywhere," I said. She stopped and turned to me. She looked sad.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"It was just a dream. But I felt empty and alone knowing you were in love with another man."

"Dreams are like that. . ." she said with no smile.

"Dreams are like what?" I asked as we left the room.

