

Perchance to Dream

by Nonnie Augustine

Catherine, after another haunted, bewildering morning wondered if there might be a way to hide from her nightmares. Was there a way to trick them? Shouldn't she try?

She drove over the bridge, something she didn't often do, to buy essential oils at the Mount Olive Health Food Store. The hipster behind the counter was sympathetic to her problem although he said he never had bad dreams, or not that he remembered. He named all the types of oil that might work without needing to look them up. Catherine was impressed by his expertise. She was wary of the exotic names and chose lavender and sandalwood, bought a diffuser and went home with hope and yet another promise to herself to shop there more often, to become savvy about herbs and organic supplements, to care for herself.

She fell asleep in luxurious mists of soothing fragrance, but her nightmares found her despite the calming scents. She still woke at 3 a.m., sweaty and terrified. Her dreams shamed her. Why were loved ones, living and dead, thrashing about her brain while she slept? Why were they ugly and violent? Vivid images nighttime images attacked her during waking hours. An uncle, she didn't know which, punched a hole in a wall large enough to push her mother through, then he scrambled after her so that they could hide. One of her living brothers was coming soon. There were many people, (who were they?) rushing to get away because this brother (a charming, dear man!) was binge-drinking and vindictive. In another dream an emaciated, diseased dog stood trembling a few feet away from her. Catherine wanted a different brother, the dead one, to shoot the animal but he refused angrily. The dog bit a gray cat. The bloody cat yowled and Catherine looked at a table full of rifles and she picked one up and aimed but woke up before she fired. She loved dogs. Why did she dream that?

Every few nights she would sense a nightmare stalking her, waiting just beyond her eyelids. Catherine all but gave up on

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television. She stayed up as long as she could and read carefully chosen books. She plowed through a biography about Margaret Fuller, a nineteenth century transcendentalist, dry to be sure for most of the chapters, but then near the end it turned on her with war in Italy, a scandalous love affair and secret marriage, a shipwreck and the deaths of Fuller, her young Italian husband and their infant. The night she finished it she immediately picked up a book on gardening and tried to hide from her nightmares with advice on pruning and soil types, slumped into sleep while sitting up and dreamed about a bar fight and escaping from it by running up and down endless city streets, knowing that if she found a green door she'd be safe, but, of course, she only turned corner after corner without seeing any green doors.

Finally, Catherine accepted her nightmares as a lasting change in her life. There would be no hiding. When the dream horrors found her during sunny afternoons pulling weeds or while volunteering at the library on Thursdays, smiling at the seniors browsing the mystery aisle, she'd lower her chin and steel herself for the terror, disgust or helplessness that caught and tilted her. She'd acknowledge it. If she was in her home she'd hold one of the cats, or cradle her little dog in her arms, bury her nose in their breathing flanks, let touch bring her back to the moment. If she were shopping or in her car she'd stop what she was doing and succumb to being haunted for as long as it took. Although she continued to be momentarily knocked out of her life by the shame of her dreams, she stopped trying to puzzle them out. The awful moments would pass and Catherine would flick her hand by her ear, chasing the pictures on their way. She enjoyed doing this. She returned to reading poetry and novels that thrilled her, moved her, took her down endless grand avenues and dirty alleys and into unfamiliar rooms, even when there might be danger, even when there might be a scene to spark a memory of sex.

In her queen size bed with a cat or two and her dog, lavender floating around them, she slept. After all, the nightmares only found her every two or three nights. She cherished the hope that her mind

would choose good, or at least bland, dreams to remember, but sadly, it never did.

