

Rescued From A Dream

by Paul Steven Stone

It was a dream. At least I think it was a dream.

I was walking across a steel footbridge that spanned a wide, dark chasm. There were six people on the bridge, myself included, and we were making our way across when something exploded—it was more a rifle shot than explosion, actually—and it cut like a razor through the delicate fabric of the moment.

Even asleep, I knew what it was. We all knew what it was. It was the sound of a cable snapping, a thick braid of steel that in the moment of its release executed a flurry of spastic gyrations. Most of us froze in place to watch this macabre dance, our situation suddenly becoming too frightening to comprehend.

Remember, this was all happening in a dream—on a dream footbridge made of dream cables and dream steel plates—so don't expect to find engineering flaws or the laws of physics within the precincts of this story.

Two of us on the bridge were adult males and probably shared the same anxious realization that we were supposed to do something; something more than run for our lives. Each of us probably struggled with that same archetypal protocol whereby men take charge in moments of crisis and danger—are *supposed* to take charge! Especially when children are involved; and there were two of that species, a four and a seven year old, among our party.

When the first cable snapped I was separated from the group, walking ahead, about two thirds of the way across the bridge. The actual sound of the cable's "snap" seemed to echo in the air for minutes rather than seconds, running through the steel holdings of the footbridge like a frightened quivering song.

Within moments, the bridge was shaking and twisting like a runaway effect from a Hollywood movie.

And then the rain began.

"It's raining!" I called, turning around and shouting to be heard above the blustery storm. The bridge was twisting insanely now,

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cable wires splitting all around us, the steel holdings offering a rising symphony of protest.

"Watch out!" someone called and I dropped to the floor just in time to avoid an angry dancing cable.

I wasn't down more than a few seconds, but time enough to realize there were only two possible paths I could travel. Two totally divergent paths at that.

As I scrambled back to my feet, two voices inside my head competed for my attention...and for my soul.

"Run!" the first voice called, pulling me towards the bridge's end point just a short distance away. But also pulling me towards a darker and lesser known place within myself.

"Go back!" a second voice cried, calling me to turn around and help save the others.

One voice pleading, "Save yourself."

The second urging me to "Save the others."

But what could I do? In a quick look I saw that returning to the center of the bridge would only add one more problem to the mounting tally. Nobody would magically escape because I took further risks. No one's life arc would be visibly altered. There would merely be one more victim needing to be rescued. What was the sense in that?

"Run!" the first voice repeated.

Before the second voice could answer, I made my decision. I would run for safety. And, yes, save myself without thought for the others. But the next moment, when I started scrambling forward, I stopped almost immediately at the sound of a voice, a little girl's voice, rising up from the chaos behind me. Her plaintive cry cut to my core, making it impossible for me to run. Rescuing me from my darker, weaker self with a single frightened word.

"Daddy!"

The next moment, as if something pulled at my hand, I turned around and headed back into the worst of the destruction, not even sure the bridge would remain intact long enough for me to reach the others. Or to find the child whose cry wrenched me from my fears.

Did I eventually reach her? I don't know. Nor do I know if we survived or fell into the chasm. Because suddenly the dream was over and I was waking up to find my little daughter standing next to my bed, staring down at me. Strangely enough she too had been frightened by a dream.

She pulled anxiously at my hand. And for the second time that night I heard her call out, "Daddy!" in a tiny frightened voice.

Only this time I was awake.

