

Traum

by Sheila Luecht

Almost forty years ago I had a lover. He was intelligent, intense and somewhat emotionally isolated. To me he connected in a way that was very deep, very familiar, almost like two people who had known each other in the past.

I observed that he seemed to be searching and pointed it out. "See, in this picture, where you should be joyous with your love, as she is with you, you look, well, disconnected." Every picture in the album told the same story. The soul looked out from the body with indifference. Disconnection. I could see it. He could not. His then wife was the woman in the pictures, this was a story of their life together. She was very much in his life at present, but he was searching. Desperately trying to connect with who he was, who he wanted to be.

He told me the story of their romance. It was difficult to imagine because where I came from, the state had no hold on romance. There, however, it did. He could not live with his girlfriend without marrying her. She could not get a job as a teacher, unless they were married. The official religion of the country, ruled the country. Never a good combination. So, for the sake of love, they were conventional. It did not seem to enhance the relationship, only it did seem to highlight the disparity of emotions, of experience, of desire. How could there be anything but affairs? I balked at the system, I could not conceive of the propriety enough to accept it. In my mind you just did not marry someone unless you really wanted to. I would live a lifetime of finding out that in many other cultures around the world, people did not marry for love.

Over our short, yet enduring relationship, I found that he was desperately trying to reconcile his ambitions with his situation. I left and he continued to be unhappy, trying to "fix" what he now realized

had been broken all along. In the end, a span of a year or so, he did leave for good. Their marriage was dissolved. He moved on to relationship after relationship, asking me periodically to return. I did once, about five years later. Our prior interlude was a memory, and one fixed in time for both of us. We met as friends at this time and continued as friends for all these years. I felt after some time that I was the life guide, his life guide. He assumed a track, and became very successful, more so than myself, well, perhaps in a different way. His life is a good one, he has children, a great wife and happiness in his own world.

I woke up from an intense dream today. I was with my daughter, in her twenties, at a conference. There is something about sharing a ham sandwich and details about that, but more importantly, three packages are delivered to me, very unexpectedly. I receive them and my daughter opens one for me. Each package is an overstuffed manila envelope, bound with clear packing tape in a string pattern, with black marker address and other markings. There are stamps on them. She opens one and it is a set of large 8 by 10 inch pictures. They seem to be of a party. The people are all ones I know from my time in that country. I see him, his wife and their two little girls. They are grown now, but here they are little. His wife is dressed in a beautiful red gown with satin waist and flowing chiffon. They sit near each other on steps in a sunken living room. Their girls have pretty party dresses on that look like their native costumes but just in a few details. The room is filled with my friends from long ago, they are all in suits and nicely dressed, it is in black and white, but the grays are stand out. It does not occur to me to notice that I know her dress is red, the color of love.

On a chair across from them there is one naked man, he is jolly. I recognize him; he had accompanied this friend of mine on a trip once to the states. He was a happy guy and really it seemed normal to see him in the midst of all these people, intellectuals gathering for

some kind of academic soiree, naked. Like a display of indifference for all the propriety, it made me smile.

The envelope that I opened had a number of pictures all different sizes, mostly of places that I would remember from my time with him, each picture seemed to be from that same time period and included his children, again when they were younger. He had placed and posed them in these scenes, almost like he was trying to convey something to me. That all those places we had been together, now he reminds me of our times together and no one would know that he visits them even now. Or, he visits these places and reclaims them from our times together and he shares them with his precious children, giving them a piece of himself, from long ago.

I never saw what was in the third envelope. Honestly, I am indifferent to it. Just when that might have occurred, my husband came in to wake me and kiss me good bye as he left for work. It is, after all, a very good life.

