

Past Meets Future in Dream About Present-revised

There are a couple of phrases in the English language that are inherently terrifying. “Your money or your life,” that classic warning of imminent assault, is one of them. “I had this amazing dream last night,” is another. How many times have you heard that refrain, only to be completely unamazed by a longwinded tale comprised mostly of brain trash wending its way through the dreamer's unconscious? Of course, the problem is not always that the fragments are senseless, but that the dreamer, when pressed for interpretation, invariably says something like, “Oh, I think I just ate some bad fish last night.” The bottom line is that, while dreams can be fascinating, most dreamers are not.

But I really did have this amazing dream last night. It came on the heels of our most recent studio move, a move that, while not our choice, did not make me altogether unhappy. The old studio was cute and roomy, but it was also cold all winter and hot all summer. Every now and then I would discover a roach the size of a toy poodle roaming my office. The noise from cars, sirens, and people yelling in the street below was distracting. It was like living in a college dorm without the benefit of youth.

My husband and I made plans to move to a clean, comfortable, quiet studio in St. Elmo. Within moments of signing the lease, a calm of the sort I hadn't felt in three years descended over me. Here was a place where I could paint and write without a coat on, or without stripping down to my underwear. Where sirens would not pierce my thoughts every twenty seconds. Where I would not be compelled to jump up a hundred times a day to see if the screech of brakes on the street below was fatal. My husband and I hugged. We fist-bumped. We exhaled.

That night I dreamed about the boyfriend of my early twenties. He was still (how lucky for me) thirty-five. I kissed him. Passionately, to make up for the twenty-two years I have not been kissing him. I cannot deny that I considered my options: keep the husband, or return to the boyfriend? It was a close race. The husband is smart and funny and generous and fair. The boyfriend was thirty-five. In the end, I woke up rather than decide.

The next morning, as my husband and I prepared to move more than a decade's-worth of art, freelancing, and other accoutrements of self-employment from one studio to the other, I told him

about the dream. To his enormous credit he did not say, “Don’t you love me honey?” He did not say, “How dare you,” or “Do you still love him?” or even, “Can I keep the Kindle if we divorce?” Instead he said, “What is it you’re re-thinking?”

The answer was almost as simple as eating bad fish.

“Leaving the old studio,” I said.

People who know me know that I have a history of dwelling happily in questionable residences. The reasons for this are too involved to go into here, but suffice it to say I have always taken a certain comfort from serious and at times appalling discomfort. At one point I lived in a house that had no appliances, heat, or air-conditioning, which is where I was when my relationship with the ex-boyfriend began. He himself lived so sparingly (one room apartment, no phone, no bank account) that a friend once remarked I’d found myself in a man. It was only fitting that, upon divorcing myself from the old studio, a representative from my old life would come bearing a message of ambivalence. As my husband so aptly pointed out, I didn’t have to decide between the old place and the new, but I did need to respect the past. The old studio, like the old boyfriend, was an important piece of that.

Which is where the dream comes to an end. We have moved, and I look forward to settling in. Like the ex-boyfriend, I expect that the old studio will make an appearance in some future dream, when I need a reminder of my days, and my lives, gone by.