

DREAMS ARE SOMETHING MORE

I

She is the dark lady
I can see her clearly even now
dream-phantom, truth-revealer
I was twelve when she called me out inside a dream
I was twelve, knew nothing about sex
knew nothing about ejaculation
had never kissed—or been kissed—with intent

Oh I had an inkling, knew the school yard rumours, had held hands even
But then when I was twelve I had a dream
which was astonishing for its clarity
startling in its reality
Over three decades later
I marvel at the revelation
of something which I did not—
could not—know anything of—
complete in its manifestation
in particulars exact
prescient, filled with adult knowledge
in experience as real and certain as any waking moment

Infatuation I knew—the biological nudge of wing nubs forming
I was twelve, and fair-haired, fresh-faced Janet
 with skinny legs and mounding breasts
 Janet-who-ran-with-Mary-somewhat-wild
Janet held my hand
 Janet whose compass point could surreptitiously breach
 the most carefully guarded rear, as giggling
 by, she gave the wary boys a quick sharp poke in the bum
At the end-of-the-year party
Janet held my hand
gliding around Memorial Gardens
my cheeks scorched by the intensity of hand touching hand—
Who knew that hands could give such pleasure?
I remember I was wearing a red shirt
I remember my skin was dry, blood pooling against it,
radiating heat, an incandescent aura silhouetted around me
I remember Janet's hand in mine, our feet flying around the rink

frictionless, effortless, those old platform roller blades
bearing us up like a magic carpet skimming above the concrete

Janet held my hand and I felt the presence
of something, a semi-permeable membrane,
giving way, going plop, restructuring itself
Who I was was suddenly redefined—my limits extended
I was twelve years old, a naïve adolescent
Sex was not a stirring in my groin
sex was a stirring of my entire body engorged with blood
sex was hot pressure pooling around my spine
my cheeks bursting
a spout of light particles gushing out the top of my head
Riding that concrete wave
Janet's hand was my hand
The waters of absolution spilled over us

And that was the entirety
of what I knew about sex,
no more than that and it was enough.

If you've never had sex, how can you anticipate it?
My knowledge of sex was confined to holding Janet's hand
to the hush of gossip, to the mystery and innuendo of puns and winks
to little medical pamphlets which liberal goodwill left lying around
What can one know of sex from such sources?
For a twelve year old sex has all the reality of Santa Claus—
something you can hardly believe in—
but what a world if the promise were true

II

But then I had a dream
It divided my life, before twelve and after
I had a dream as complete and real as any waking moment
I dreamed of her—the dark lady
raven black hair, face in shadow, a Titian voluptuousness
calling me to her from the nearness of the dark room
her skin—her naked skin—as bright as the surface of the moon,
a transfixing brightness,
and our bodies fly together gracefully, knowingly
our legs entangled, hands clasped, lips brushing
frictionless, effortless, I relax into her like hot Kinsmen Beach sand
her breath in my ear like the lapping surf
the sheets rustling like leaves, the springs calling like seagulls
Groin pressing into groin, naturally, unremarkably

The compass point of reconciliation, of wholeness
The intensity not of penetration but of liberation
My twelve year old self could know nothing of this
and yet my dream self knew
riding a surge of life force pulled taut between sphincters
between anus and lips a reflecting wave,
a throbbing pulse sparking across a nether gap
My penis before now used only for peeing
Stiffens with intent, a singular point, the universe collapsing all about,
The waters receding, the wind abating
Coitus in perpetuitas
And then—the release of semen
The textbook cracked open, obscure words spilling into tactile experience
The waters pour in, released from above and below
The universe floods back into form
but made new
gravity is suspended
the horizon is gone
I am linked to the dark lady
My eyes see with her eyes
Beams shine forth from our pupils
illuminating all before us

And then—I notice the wetness
I am awake, reluctantly awake
My eight year old brother, the bed-wetter, turns over
The bed shifts with a crackle of plastic
the safety net for those whose bladders involuntarily
release the acidic fluid, the pooling waste within
the liquid bath heated to 98.6° F, the spa-like warmth
that too soon turns cold and unpleasant
nudging his fellow night-traveller (caught
in the mathematics of four beds, five kids) awake
But not this night, the bed is dry
The warmth is the warmth of ten thousand suns
The wetness is dense, concentrated, contracted—
a healing salve spread in a gob across the tip of my awareness
consuming me like a hammer blow
but if this is pain it is exquisite
the intense limit of embodied pleasure transforming nerve ends
The caterpillar of pleasure expelled from the cocoon
of a dream spreads butterfly wings of joy
My dream self, who had a knowledge I could never have had
gave me a gift, more than an intimation, a knowing
a genuine experience of what was to come
My dream would be reduced to a wet dream,

the healing salve a nocturnal emission
but this I would know beyond all explanation
sex is love manifest.

Interlude

Some half dozen years would pass
before I slept with a woman
 slept with — a euphemism for sex
 sleep a substitution for death
 sex and death tied together, metaphors merging
 euphemisms making us necrophiliacs
Death the earnest would say
 is not at all like sleeping—
 that Shakespearean disservice
 to sleep, perchance to dream
In death there is nothing
 nothing any reasonable person could claim
What could my twelve year old self know
of the conflict between ways of knowing
of the chasm between science and religion
of the loss since the Enlightenment
of an understanding of omens
 communications from the real realness of reality
 directing our attention to the unfolding aspects
 of being and becoming
the acausal call of the world to attend
to that which impedes our wholeness
the here and now choice
of how to place our heart

We have lost the amulets of protection
the talismans of attraction
the oracular nature of birds
the prophetic flight of dreams

But then the poet knows that
which the philosopher cannot entertain
Beyond death is life; the analogue holds
(sleep, sex, death, life).

III

When finally in real waking life I slept with a woman
there was certainly no sleeping going on
We were idling in the late summer grass

along Chippewa Creek surrounded by crickets
A few wolf-like turns in the field had matted out a bed
The tall dense grass jutted up
like a veil between us and the world
securing our experiments-in-pleasure in the open air
Voices drifted past us on the path
as we invisible to all except our embodied selves
our naked selves pursued each others fingers
across the length of our being
around the compass points of our desire
daring ourselves to join
daring ourselves to cleave asunder our innocence
our bodies rubbing together with vigour
impelling the genie to leap from the bottle
Suddenly we stop
two strollers are veering toward us
coming closer and closer
We are barely still, reckless with passion
And then—they are veering away
suspended breath returns
But we are left as if for the first time
aware of our nakedness
Our cloak of invisibility pierced
we abandon our pursuit
and return by the back way
to where our parents are gathered
We linger in the back yard in the early dark beside a tree
The incandescent yellow of the kitchen light not quite reaching us
The voices of our parents, the voices that sang us to sleep those many nights
 the voices we knew from deep within the womb
 the voices that carried us, informing us
 the voices that we know now better than anything else in the world
 the voices that fit like keys in our ears
the voices of our parents reached across the lawn
like the drone of eastern music
Suddenly we are on the ground
in the shadows below the tree
The stubbles of cut grass poke into our skin
 not here the softness by the creek
 not here neither the nakedness nor the innocence
We are clinicians, rough like burlap
we are efficient, a bare minimum of clothing rearranged
like veils shifted but not drawn back
Penetration is like the quick sharp jab of the nurse's needle
and I am suddenly alone
Someone far away is saying, "No—stop—that hurts—not so hard—slower!"

Hips twitching like frogs legs completing a circuit
A detached voice, scientifically detached, is saying, "So, this is what sex is."
Graceless, we negotiate a conclusion
We are standing, zipping, tidying
The ground heaves as if we stepped off a merry-go-round
We stumble away from the light,
away from the voices, out into the back alley
Why am I thinking of my grandmother's hand holding a switch?
"What have we done?" I am saying, "Do you know what we just did?"
My partner is distant, brusque, dismissive of my incredulity
And then suddenly like a rapidly shifting dreamscape
the late summer stars massing above us
we are before the double-spired church.
At my prompting we are through the double-doors
stepping into the cathedral space
me, an atheist—at least I thought I was an atheist
Sex was just another body function
and the church was hostile to sex, or so I thought—
I was a Protestant atheist knowing nothing
of the Catholic adoration of Mary
and I say I thought I was an atheist
because I didn't believe in that bearded God up there
sitting on a throne dispensing justice left and right—
I thought I was an atheist because my religious caretakers
had given me such an impoverished image of God
claiming it as the only image of God
refusing to see how no reasonable person in the latter part of the twentieth century
could ever believe in a God whose domain we had reached and found vacant
And now overwhelmed by what we had just done
I am standing before the cross, in the presence of something darkly perceived
My partner is pulling my hand, urging us to leave
I am transfixed. Where is the togetherness promised in my dream?
The icons are silent
A bleeding Jesus, genitals carefully masked, hangs oblivious
 I am remembering a report that those who are hung get hard-ons
 and I am wondering if it applies equally to those who are crucified

Overwhelmed by what we had just done
and feeling empty at the same time,
caught between the magnitude and the meaninglessness of an act
the reality of which was a pale imitation of my dream—
there is a sudden disconnect, a yanked disjuncture in my brain
My partner's tugs prevail, and we are gone

Coda

Some many years after this
and with much distress in between
something of the promise of that dream
something of the intimacy
something of the wholeness
something of the paradox
would be realized
in an idle moment unsought—
sex as the raw
manifestation of love—
and the world would be reconciled
in a twelve year old's intimations.

The dark lady, dream-phantom, truth-revealer
steps outside a dream, manifest-reality
incarnated as a raven-haired winged-being
bestowing gifts, illuminating and liberating.