

Living the Dream

Part 1

Her kids are where-ever, outside playing. Or they aren't home yet from school; Mona isn't sure. She scratches her head and looks around the house at the messes piled up of dirty dishes and clothes. 'Not today' she murmurs to herself for about the 10th day in a row. She has nothing else to do, nowhere to go. She takes her meds and calls a guy named Brody who she went out with once or twice. He comes over and they make love. He leaves before the kids come home. The kids come home and she fixes dinner. After dinner, there is nothing. The kids go up to their rooms, video games, phones and computers. She calls her boyfriend Karl. He goes over to visit. They lock her door and make love. He leaves in less than an hour. It's approaching midnight, she goes to bed. She dreams of being in a convent, no kids no men. The other nuns accept and love her, share secrets and pray with her. She has a life here. She wakes the next day enveloped in a pleasurable bubble which promptly bursts when it meets the first crusty edges of the new morning. Her head hurts and she has a dry mouth; Karl was not gentle with her. She gets the kids ready for school. They make their own lunches. All she does is sleep, get the kids off to school in the morning, sleep some more, cook an occasional dinner and go to bed. She doesn't work. She is on disability, "mental" not "physical" in the nomenclature of the government. The physicality and grinding of the casual sex calms her easily frazzled nerves and clears her head, for a few hours anyway.

She calls horny Harold, an older guy who invites her with him all over the world. She doesn't go. She goes once on his yacht overnight and comes home so sore she needs vaginal compresses soaked in chamomile. He comes over and they make love. After he leaves she goes back to sleep.

She dreams of waking into a room full of horny Harold look-a-likes of varying sizes from short to tall who look at her admiringly. They are on his yacht with gourmet food buffets and servants. She dances with each of the Harolds and swims off the side of the boat. After each dance, that Harold jumps on top of and surrounds the preceding one, forming a Matryoshka doll of Harolds. Mona dotes on the doll, caressing it, then suddenly throws it down on the floor shattering it into little pieces which starts her laughing so hard and loud that she wakes herself up still laughing. She falls back asleep and into a period in her early teens when she discovers her vagina and begins to play with and caress it. The temporary pleasure displaces her fear and loneliness.

An hour or so later she wakes again into another dream, not into her bleary bewildered life as Mona the disabled mom. Even while asleep, her heart wells up into her chest and eyes elated that she is here not there, living the dream, living it, living the goddam dream baby. Escaped from her disabled self and on the run, she gets up and goes to the bathroom. She turns on the sink and splashes water on her face, grabs a towel and looks into the bathroom mirror. There she sees a beautiful and powerful creature, a captivating mythical version of herself. She reaches for it and climbs through the mirror pursuing it into a bedroom where Mona lays sleeping. The sleeping Mona watches, watching herself, sees all of this and thinks she is awake, thinks she has discovered the secret to transcendence that the nuns taught her.

The nuns teach that one's so called real life is a perpetual swim upstream to the far more real and everlasting life of which dreaming is but a taste; to the spawning ground of pure unadulterated delight. They speak of pain as a spiritual lapse, an illusion, a satanic construct; its deconstruction

as the first act of transcendence. Mona the dream chaser listens politely and smiles an awkward smile while biting down on her lip, hearing but not listening, staring with big blank innocent puppy eyes at their faces with great concentration in an earnest effort to understand each word they utter but still not quite grasping. In the presence of the nuns she is unsteady, off balance, effaced, a toad who needs kissing. Mona, they say, you will come around, you will unify, God will unify you, you will grow from all of this groaning, we will call you Grona. We are your guardian angels. We will not leave you, ever.

Part 2

Mona's pain. It has a will that is stronger than her own. She fights it for years and is knocked down so many times she loses count. How many is so many? How many stars are there? OK, never mind, how many stars shot out of the cosmos into this world whom no one talks to when they arrive, who are sealed off in a bubble of indifference, only their genitals to keep them company, bombarded by inattention, hollowed out by unrequited parental love and benumbed by a psychic weight so immense they don't feel it, don't feel anything? That many. She cannot manage so she crashes hard and is thrown from the metaphoric wreckage into a barren field where the king of pain the devil stands over her with his arms in the air, gloating like a prizefighter who has knocked out his opponent; some opponent: a confused defenseless featherweight. He, this devil, or it, is a big bully and a rapacious if not insatiable predator of the weak and vulnerable .

Fortunately she doesn't burn when she crashes, though she catches fire a few times, more than a few. In this field she gathers the broken pieces of herself and attempts to re-assemble them into she knows not what or whom, some semblance of a person.

Here she eludes it effortlessly. In her dream ecosystem, unable to occupy and eat away at the host organism, to attach itself to her operating system and nibble on it, pain loses its way and retreats. Around Mona the dream chaser it is shut out, orphaned. Here, she is safe, immunized from grief, inoculated from nightmares. Nightmares are banished. They flee. Her meds nuke them. They set mines in her subconscious to blow them up, blow them sky high if they dare to tread here. Elevated dopamine is the nightmare's nightmare, destroying it like weedkiller. Her pain and grief finally take the hint, quit their pursuit and slither under a rock outside her house, preening and lurking.

She opens the curtains. The hazy winter sun spins downward, a pale yellow yo-yo on a celestial string. A bland-colored bird sits on the ledge outside her bedroom window. It chirps a little but is mostly silent, staring, its little head pivoting side to side about 30 degrees at a time. She looks up and sees airplane exhaust written in the sky but no airplane. Dogs unseen bark outside. A car pulls into her neighbor's driveway across the street and disappears into the garage in a blink of her eyes. Her breathe appears on the inside of the bedroom window, then retreats, then appears again, She doesn't want to be awake. She wants to continue dreaming. She has a life here. Her heart beats here, it lives here, it doesn't reside her, it *lives* here. She feels something like wings or gills beginning to sprout from her flanks, the captivating mythical creature taking shape, the mother of all mankind. Dreaming, on her bed in her bedroom sleeping, Mona the disabled mother smiles.

The little bird flies away. As it lifts off it turns into a majestic owl which spins its head almost completely around to get a look at Mona with its fiery eyes. The warm white airplane exhaust

vanishes from the sky eaten up by the turbulent cold air. The neighbor's car remains hidden in the garage, invisible from without like the layered dreams inside Mona's head. The dogs stop barking except one. She goes to seek out the desperate bark drawn by its persistence and commitment, traits she lacks. The dog barks because its owner, an old lady, falls in her house and can't move. Mona locates the barking and takes care of the woman until help arrives. Horny Harold drives the ambulance. Brody and Karl carry the stretcher. Mona notices that the lady on the stretcher is her, Mona, being attended to, needing help and getting it. Her eyes are open and she is smiling, content. As they drive off the yo-yo sun sinks below the horizon and immediately comes up behind her like northern Norway in mid summer. The swirling winds pick up and carry her home to her bedroom and bed.

Part 3

Mona's teen daughter, her oldest, is pregnant, factually verifiably objectively pregnant. She doesn't know it yet; she's only about a month along. Mom dreams it like a prophesy, with a big belly and her book bag getting off the bus after school with her two younger brothers. The pregnant teen picks up a puppy off the street and carries it towards home to her mother. "Can we keep it Mom, please?" Mona the non disabled dream-chaser mom goes out to greet the bus and the children and they all walk home hand in hand four across plus the puppy. This Mona sees no reason why not, two new young ones in the home will bring luck and blessings. The pregnant teen will help raise the baby and they will all raise the puppy. Mom greets the future with joy and confidence. She loves the child already. All of them go bounding into the house together laughing boisterously and carrying on

“Are the kids home already?” Mona the disabled mom wakes and sits up, startled. She thinks she hears commotion downstairs. She opens her bedroom curtains to see where the sun is, to see approximately what time it is. It is on the way down the celestial string. An airplane streaks past overhead trailing billows of exhaust; dogs on leashes going opposite directions walk past barking at each other, a car pulls out backwards from the neighbor’s garage across the street; and a small bird is busy building a nest outside her bedroom on the window ledge. Her actual kids are actually coming up the street from the bus stop. They all have book bags. The pregnant teen looks up towards the house and sees her mom looking back at her through her bedroom window. The teen makes a funny face at her. Mona puts out a wan smile and a static wave. She remembers the dream and puts her waving hand down. The pain hiding out under the rock in front of her house returns.

She doesn’t want it taken away, or to have to leave it, her active dream life in which hope dots all landscapes and all veils are removed. Waking out of it is a painful jolt, painful enough, but another mouth to feed, crying in the night, doctors appointments and shots, having to take care of another being like her grandmother did of her, or tried to, when will it stop? She quickly downs her meds and picks up the phone to set up the usual dalliance with another guy. This one or that one, it doesn’t matter. The kids come into the house. The pregnant teen runs up the stairs excited to see mom and ask her if they can get a puppy. Mom snaps “no,” chafed, and the child backs out of the bedroom, humiliated like Mom used to be by those over her who regularly reduced her to tears. She retreats to her bathroom where she throws up first trimester nausea and then jumps into bed and promptly falls asleep.

Part 4, Closing

That night, in the dead of night, well past midnight, Mona wakes. She is rested, the dream chaser is awake and living the dream with a live-stream to Mona the sleeping mom . Her head rises from the pillow, a transparent gossamer silhouette of itself. The house is quiet. There's a little moonlight peeking through a small opening in the bedroom curtain. She hears wind rapping gently at the window as if asking her to come outside to play. She puts on gym shoes and goes outside to jog. She jogs as much as she can until she comes home at first light, sweaty and exhausted. She gets in the shower where she runs into the other Mona, Mona the disabled mom, just waking. They embrace and hold onto each other, not wishing to let go, heads on the other's shoulder, reconciled and unified in their commitment to swim together the long slow swim upstream, against the current, towards the spawning ground. Their hearts begin to race in sync. The waking Mona asks the jogger if the teen is indeed pregnant. She answers yes, she is. The waking Mona asks if they should have it aborted. The jogger takes Mom's hand and leads her into the teen's bedroom where she is still sound asleep. They look down. They both cry. The girl wakes up. "Don't worry" she says, "I know already." Mona and the jogger go back in the shower. The teen follows and joins them. They all wash and dry each other in long loving strokes. Mona the awakening disabled mom gets dressed and wakes the other children. She puts on music and decides she will drive the kids to school today. The pregnant teen loads her book bag and makes herself an extra sandwich for lunch. The jogger blends back into Mona the awakening mom, not at all disappointed with her night's work.