

The Dream that Haunts Me

On January 1, 2013, I had a dream so vivid that I awoke at 3am to write it down. It doesn't really make much sense. But, I wanted to present it – unedited and in its entirety.

This is how it unraveled:

When I awoke that morning, a dry heat radiated over me as if the sun had crawled into bed and decided upon a morning cuddle. Half awake and fumbling, I managed to get myself out from under the sheets and over to the A/C unit. As expected, I forgot to turn the air on last night. I looked at the panel in shame, as if it had some part to play in my forgetfulness. I pressed the *on* button, let out an audible sigh, and made my way into the bathroom to begin my day.

I'm not sure why my parents decided to take us to Australia. They'd never shown interest in music before, let alone traveling to a foreign continent. Yet, here we were, attending the Big Day Out Festival, full of musical acts they'd never heard of nor cared about until this very day. What brought about this sudden change in attitude? It's a mystery that continues to elude me.

After wrapping up my typical morning routine, I journeyed to the front of the hotel and joined my parents in the car. Luckily, they had the wherewithal to turn on the A/C – unlike me. We made our journey to the festival grounds, where we parked the car in some far off field, before making the trek to the front gate. That was the last I saw of my parents for a long, long time. Not because we don't love each other, mind you. It was simply out of sheer boredom for their new found rejuvenation.

Five hours later, I found myself sitting on a rotting log, listening to Friendly Fires. For whatever reason, the music just wasn't resonating with me and that's when I decided to head home. As I was walking toward the front gate, I saw a group of drifters out of the corner of my eye. One of them had a bike, which I decided to negotiate for. It was pointless. It turns out the earth had been responsible for my interest all along. I discovered this when the man told me it was his destiny to gift me the bike. Though, I should probably mention he was also higher than a kite in space.

I didn't argue. Why would I? I wanted the bike and I didn't have to spend a penny. I thanked him again and begin pedaling my way out of the festival and along the rural roads that led me here. I eventually came upon a very new – and rather high-tech – convenient store. I tried to get in, but I couldn't find the door. Goddamn all-glass buildings. That's when I realized this was some sort of drive-thru. My bike just wasn't heavy enough to trigger the doors. So, I stomped and stomped until I hit the actuator just right. The doors swung open and I walked my bike into the store. It was full of thousands of machines hoarding all the necessities you could ever want or need – or so I thought. The only thing I couldn't find was candy, which was really all I wanted.

Having efficiently wasted my time, I made my way back down the road until I came upon a strip mall. I remember it was a rather odd location, because there were no homes as far as the eye could see. I stopped in though and continued my search for candy. I came across a mom-and-pop store and headed in. It was full of baskets and trinkets lining every inch. To my right there was an older couple rocking back and forth in some wooden chairs, taking little notice of me at all. From what I could hear of their conversation, they were having a spirited argument on what to do about their single nephew. It sparked my interest briefly, but the sight of candy put it out of mind.

Back on the road, I downed my chocolate morsels and put the empty wrapper in my pocket. Eventually, I arrived back at the hotel where I called the airline and asked about switching my flight. They had seats available on a later departure, so I booked it and went about my day. All in all, the trek had been pretty straight forward – hotel-airport-home. I ended up giving my newly procured bike to a child on the sidewalk. And I'm pretty sure I made that kid's day.

The flight was grueling. As are most things that require you to sit in a cramped cabin miles above the earth. I popped a couple Unisom though, so I can't complain too much as I was sleeping for a majority of the trip. But, I'm entitled to my opinion and I say the flight sucked.

I grabbed my bags, hailed a cab, and headed to my grandma's house. When I arrived, I found much of my extended family celebrating something. They really didn't take much notice of me, other than a random *Hi* here and there. They didn't even bother to ask where my parents were or for that matter where the hell I'd even been.

My littlest cousins were on the floor playing Xbox on a TV so ancient I was a little astounded they were able to hook it up in the first place. My grandma sat on the couch, crosswords in her hand. It looks like she got bored of them not too long ago, as she's asleep and letting out passive whimpers every minute or so.

Obviously, this wasn't the reception or scene I was hoping for. So, I went back upstairs and fumbled around in my bags for a stick of gum. I then moved my way into the kitchen, where my aunts and uncles were drinking around a half-eaten cake. They carried on their conversation, again, with little fanfare for my presence. My Aunt Mary looked up at me, took a swig of her beer, and motioned to go into the living room. I turned around and she followed.

Peering out the front window, I notice a string of cars using my grandma's lawn as a roundabout. Her house is positioned on the edge of a long, dead end road and people always get lost on it.

"Happens all the time," my aunt mermers from behind me. *"You know people always forget this road is a dead end. Grandma is just located in that unfortunate spot where people have the chance to turn around."*

I can feel it in my bones that this isn't right. How can people be so disrespectful that they could just plow through someone's beautifully manicured lawn? The last car – a monstrous black SUV – maneuvers through the lawn, except this one goes right through my grandma's garden. A rage infects me like nothing I'd felt before. My grandma loves that garden and she's going to be devastated when she discovers what happened. I shake my head, open the front door, and step out onto the porch.

"Hey! Fuck you asshole!" I yell as far as my voice will carry.

I watch as the SUV comes to a complete stop before thrusting itself into reverse. I start making my way down a long stretch of grass to meet the stranger, eye-to-eye. They roll down their window and we engage in a rather heated exchange. I can't look this person in the eyes, because the sun is at such a point that it's showing me nothing but shadows in my general direction. I try to cup my hand over my eyes, but it doesn't help much. All I can make out is that the driver is a young woman with a very foul mouth.

We continue yelling back and forth, until the woman finally gets out of the car – engine still running. I watch as she takes a few steps forward and kneels in the center of the now ruined garden. She looks around, gently touching the bent stems and bruised petals.

"Why the fuck did you run through my grandma's garden?" I asked sternly.

She looked up at me with a somber look on her face, *"Why is it such a big deal to you?"*

Feverish that someone could even ask such a question, I blurt out, *"My grandma spends nearly every waking minute tending to these flowers. She waters them. She weeds them. She talks to them. She listens. She loves."*

She turns her eyes away from mine, uttering in a voice wrought with pain, *"So? They aren't real things. These aren't kids. They can't love you back."*

"Their kids to her!" I reply, still frustrated with the direction of this conversation.

"She created something beautiful here and you ruined it in an instant; you and that piece of shit gas-guzzler. What makes you think you can judge her for her feelings? What do you do that makes you think you can just ruin something so beautiful and pure; that you get to say my grandma's hard work isn't as important as that of yourself? You just crushed my grandma's life and you don't even give a damn. What does that say about you?"

Nearly out of breath, I awaited her answer. My heart is racing and my nostrils flare with every breath. I look down at her, but she does not look up for several seconds. When she does, she has tears in her eyes and silence in her voice. But once I see her, full of emotion, I realize just

how beautiful she is. I can't look away. I can't say a word. We just stare into each other's eyes for what seems like an eternity.

Hours pass. For the life of me, I can't tell you what just transpired. It's almost as if I got lost in my own thoughts, unable to control my actions. When I come to, the moon is up and a party has kicked into full swing inside my grandma's house. I shuffle back across the grass and in through the backdoor. The woman follows close behind me.

Our views meet for a moment. But, we quickly look away from one another, almost ashamed of the circumstances involved in our meeting today. We just lean against the wall until our eyes finally lock onto each other once again. All at once, I feel nervous, anxious, tired, energetic, sad, happy, fulfilled, and empty. I can't tell you what any of this means or why it's happening. We just stand there, looking into each other's eyes... wondering what will happen next.