

THE DREAM

She was a solitary person and a dreamer. Hardly a night went by without her having a vivid dream. So real were the dreams that they left her feeling drained when she awoke. She could remember most of them, and although she did not travel far in these dreams, she met many old friends and made many new ones. She visited places she had never seen in her waking hours, and found she could revisit them again another night.

There was one house she visited in her dreams that drew her to it again and again - that drew and repelled her at the same time. She never saw the outside of this house. In her dream, she always found herself inside, at the bottom of a wide flight of stairs that narrowed at the top. She never saw the downstairs part apart from the entrance hall, but knew the upstairs very well indeed. She knew every room - every piece of furniture, every corner, and even the smell of each room. She would climb the stairs to see at the top the gallery going round on three sides. The fourth side she never seemed to see. There were two small rooms directly facing the stairway, a larger room in each corner. Adjoining each of these rooms was another room which came round the side of the gallery. Each room had a communicating door from one to the other, except two which had alcoves leading into the two corner rooms.

One night she fell asleep and found herself at the foot of the wide stairway. She climbed the stairway to the gallery, turned right to the corner room, and from there made her way to the end room. This room was very restful and beautiful, with big windows overlooking green lawns and wooded country side. Here was peace and serenity. There was a great sense of love and well being. The furniture was large and highly polished. There were fresh flowers everywhere, and in the centre of the room was a dining table set for two, for herself and one other person she did not see.

She walked through this room into the right hand corner room. This was a very warm and friendly room. From the south window was a view of a river estuary with shipping passing by. This room smelled of aging furniture and books. It was a room for children to play in and for older people to lounge around in comfort. She sat back in a chair to recall the singing and laughter she had heard before.

She passed into the first small room and was disturbed by the soft moaning coming from it. She went into the second small room. Here the atmosphere changed. She did not want to enter this room, and so opened the door and waited. It smelled of mildew and dust, and was in a dirty condition. A fully clothed man was sleeping on one of the beds. The furniture had been polished at some time in the past, but now was strewn about with the man's possessions. He stirred as she entered the room. She had to enter it in order to get into the left hand corner room, then into the last room of all.

This corner room was very cold and damp. The chill gripped her so that she started to shiver. There was no window in this room, the only light coming from an old oil lamp which flickered and sputtered. The floor was uneven, having a three inch slope towards the last room.

She hesitated in the doorway of this last room, for she was met with a feeling of such evil and dread that she turned to go out again. But she was propelled into the room by unseen forces so strong that she was sent stumbling from side to side to the far end of the room. The floor was spongy and damp. Her feet slithered and sank with every step she took. It seemed very important that she got something from this room. She looked around for a window, but did not see one because it was hidden behind the swaying, rotting curtains that hung from ceiling to the floor. There was the smell of the sea mixed with stagnant slime. She sensed that the room was crowded with something; she could hear it breathing and passing which ever way

she turned. Every thing was ice cold to the touch and slippery. She managed to find what she was looking for, a chest, but the key was not there. The key was at the other end of the room. She struggled back for the key, pushing her way through the forces that did all in their power to stop her moving. She reached for the key, but on the way back it turned hot in her hand. It was difficult to open the chest, as she was being pressed on all sides by the 'things' that were in possession of the room. They hissed and laughed in her ears. They pulled at her and twisted her, first this way and then that way. Her mouth was too dry with horror for her to be able to cry out, or make any sound at all.

She managed to open the chest to take out some papers, but then the lid slammed shut, grazing her hand as it did so. The key had now become very hot, almost too hot to handle, yet she could not drop it. The pain made her clutch at the rotting curtains which fell down around her head, revealing a window covered in cob-webs. What little light it let in gave her strength. She beat about her with both arms and tried to run from the room. She was up to her ankles in the slimy, spongy sludge. She screamed, and this seemed to release the hold the "things" had on her. Then with a great rush of wind, she was being borne along like a feather - through the door, round the gallery, at a terrific speed, then down the stairway into the hall. She fell over and banged her head. She closed her eyes for a moment.

When she opened them again, she was sitting at the bottom of a short flight of stairs in her own home. Her head ached. She looked into a mirror and saw a nasty bruise. Then she remembered the dream. She was aware of a pain in her right hand. She turned her hand over, palm uppermost. On the outer edge was a small, jagged cut and a fresh, white scar that looked as if it had been caused by a burn.

It was shaped like a key....