

Last night I dreamed I had a child with a beautiful redhead girl. We took our baby out of the delivery room to my waiting family; Dad cried. She was a perfect fusion of our features: tufty red hair, my jaw and brow, her cheekbones. Such a swell of emotion rolled through me as I looked at her chubby little face, a rising warmth that thrilled in my heart and blanketed my mind with ease. Fragments of sound – my newborn child's laughter, the indistinct murmur of voices, the gentle sobbing of my father – filled the white walls of the hospital. When I kissed my partner on the cheek, she leaned in and rested her head on my shoulder. Our child giggled from where she lay cradled in my partner's arm. For the first time in my life, I was content.

It was a quiet type of feeling. Romantic sentiments come in many flavours. There are passionate longings, frantic desires, the painful heartache of absence – this was none of those. It was a gentle feeling of comfort, subdued and content; the holistic warmth that comes from knowing you're exactly where you're supposed to be.

I awoke to the irritating buzz of my alarm. The weight of my partner's head still rested on my shoulder, but when I looked over it was just a pillow that had drifted in the night. I dressed for work. The faces of my redheaded partner and child were waxen seals stamped upon my mind. I went to leave but lingered in the doorway. The bedroom behind me suddenly seemed so washed out, so ordinary, so empty – had I always felt this way?

On the way to work, as I sat with my head leaned against the winter-chilled train window, watching the grey city-scape rattle by, I was unsettled – swirling with nostalgia for a relationship that never even existed.

The faces of figures in our dreams are taken from people we've personally met. So, what about my redheaded love? When had I met her – *who was she?* She must have been real; I must have met her before – but where was she? I found myself looking in the faces of every redheaded woman I saw, but none were the mother of my child.

A lurid jealousy of whatever man or woman was with that redheaded girl overcame me. Knowing that we were apart and she was vulnerable to all the yobbos of the world frightened me. We were meant to be together, no – we *had been* together; this was not just some passing fancy, this was destined. If we could just meet, then everything would fall into place. '*What could I do to save her?*' I thought to myself. But the answer was nothing, so I continued to stew in my discontent.

With time, the images faded. By the end of my shift only the faintest flicker of that warmth lingered within me. My dream simply became something that *had happened*, a loosely understood event I could pick out in my mind yet not recall anything substantial about. Fear came me with the ebb of my dreaming. If I couldn't recall the face of my partner, how was I supposed to find her? Eventually, the fear receded, and a sallow melancholy settled into its place: the undeniable feeling that something important had been irrevocably lost.

I can no longer remember my baby's face, the expressions she made. Vague statements such as 'like my own' replaced the vividness of my dreaming; all that remains is the redness of her hair – just like her mother's.

