

Last night I dreamed I had a child with a beautiful redhead girl. We took the baby out of the hospital room to my waiting family; Dad cried. The little baby girl was a perfect fusion of our features: tufty red hair, my jaw and brow, her cheekbones. I felt such a swell of emotion 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 child's laughter, the indistinct murmur of voices, the gentle sobbing of my father – filled the blank space of the hospital, as if I were in a film with no soundtrack. 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 of intensity. There are passionate longings, burning 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 face of my redheaded partner and our child were stamped like a wax seal upon my mind. As I sat on the train to work an hour later, I was unsettled – swirling with nostalgia for a relationship that never existed.

Someone once told me the faces of figures in our dreams are taken from people we've personally met, their features are ones beheld by our own eyes. 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 that night, 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. '*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 in my body. I can no longer remember my baby's face, the expressions she made. Vagueries 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.