

Driving Dreams

When he was very young, Jason dreamed of a secret passage leading to a hidden habitation. In his house, hidden from everyone but Jason, a passage wound between the attic and the roof and led into a secret room. The passage into the hidden part of the house was very difficult. He was almost too big to get through. He bent, twisted, and struggled. He started to panic. He would be trapped in the tight, dark passage, but he emerged into the place no one else knew about, or in some dreams, only careful sharers of the secret.

The only place he knew of at all like that, in waking life, shared none of the numinous quality of the place in his dreams.

He didn't know how old he was then. Maybe six. He and three other boys crawled down a tunnel in the earth into a room excavated from the earth, covered with boards, with grass planted in the dirt on the boards so that it seemed natural grass all around, with the entrance hidden among the trees. Diggers of the hole had shaped benches from the earth all the way around the room.

A low table stood in the center of the room. Three candles lighted the earthen room. Two boys sat on the bench.

Several others came and jumped and landed hard on the roof above their heads, rapidly and continuously.

The boys inside the earth yelled in anger and terror, with no effect on the outside jumpers, he remembered that. Dirt fell from above them in streams, in clouds of dust, and Jason thought the roof would cave in on them. He knew then, for the first time, humans are capable of evil, and he knew evil is the ability to persist in cruel behavior without hearing the pleas of those effected.

He couldn't remember getting out of the cave. He couldn't

remember what happened afterward. He couldn't remember where that was. He couldn't remember who the other boys were nor what they looked like.

In his dreams of secret passageways, someone waits for him, no one he knows in his waking life, but in his dreams, someone he looks forward to rejoining.

Jason grows up. He begins to understand the meaning of his dreams about the difficult passage into a secret room. Then he sees it isn't meaning but meanings, and he wonders, why isn't art more like dreaming? Why isn't life more like dreaming?

After he learned to drive, the second dream began, a simple, short dream. He drove his house.

He sat down at the controls and drove the house out onto the streets and highways. He mingled with the traffic. He merged, passed, stopped and started. People in cars, busses, and trucks drove about their business, and no one paid him any more attention than they would have if he had been driving a car or a truck.

He had to be cautious about the size of what he drove and the extensions of it he couldn't see, but the people in other vehicles gave him room and worked with him, so his trips at the controls of his house always went just fine. He always found a place to park when he needed to park.

In waking life, Jason sometimes thought there really was a set of controls like in the dreams. Some houses really could be driven, if he could just get to the place where the controls were. When he was in the kitchen, they were in the bedroom. If he walked into the bedroom, the control place was in the bathroom or upstairs, at his desk. He paced the house rapidly, searching, trying to catch up, until his wife, Paula, said, "What are you after?"

He stopped short and said, "Nothing. Nothing. Just pacing," and then there was nothing, and driving houses was all just dreams.

Communication with his children became more difficult as they matured. Jason thought they were a close family, touching, confiding in each other, and depending on each other, but that seemed to be slipping away from them. Jase refused to be called Jase now. His name was Jason, and he wouldn't be called Junior. The Second was acceptable. Otherwise, Jason, and, at that, don't call him anything most of the time. Just leave him alone.

He had his world and his friends, and he didn't want to share that world with his parents. And Pauline seemed to model her behavior after his. His children were growing into a secret world, with little room for parents and other adults.

And Paula, his wife, more and more, seemed distant. If he touched her, she recoiled. If he tried to discuss what was happening to their family, to the modern world, she wasn't there. Her attention wandered, or she didn't have time to sit and talk. She sighed and said, "Jason, we've talked this over a dozen times before, and it hasn't gotten us anywhere. Why would it get us anywhere now?" She walked away.

Paula was away from home more and more. Most of the time, Jason didn't know where she was. He didn't know if changes in the way she lived were a result of what was happening with the children or something else entirely. He had dreamlike intimations of breakup, some kind of tragedy, something unpredictable and ununderstandable.

His job stayed dependably the same. The same place, the same routines, the same people. He could count on his work staying the same. He lost himself in his work.

He made more money than he needed, but money didn't buy him the feeling that he was achieving anything. It didn't buy him love. It didn't buy him peace. The work he did didn't damage the world, but neither did it bring about any positive change.

He drove buildings in his dreams now, not just houses.

Years ago, the third day of their move east, a major change into his managerial, high-paying job, a really big step toward financial success, evening falling, exhaustion settled on everyone in the family, but he had misunderstood the lay of cities and highways, and they had driven beyond the last motel for a long ways.

Except, there on the left, an old place. The restaurant was open. Jason and Jason Jr. and Paula and Pauline went in and ordered dinner. Paula asked about the motel.

The waitress said, "They rent out some of the rooms during hunting season, but that's all they use it anymore."

"Would you consider renting us a room? We really don't want to go any farther tonight."

The man who was cooking came out of the kitchen. "The rooms haven't been cleaned. They could be used, but they're a mess."

They went back and looked at the rooms, and they were really a mess. Jason felt lost and helpless, but Paula said, "We can clean them up and use our own bedding and towels." Jason couldn't see how they could do it, but Paula told him to sit and rest, and she and the kids cleaned and got the beds ready in two adjoining rooms. They built fires in the stoves. The rent was so cheap, their meals that night and the next morning and the room rent added up to less than a regular motel room. Jason thought the waitress and the cook might keep the room rent and not tell the owners anyone had been there.

Before morning, he relaxed. Everything was okay. Even the very dirty bathrooms were okay. Paula put newspapers on the floor and cleaned the toilet and the shower. You didn't have to touch the dirt to use the toilet or to take a shower.

The highway ran by close in front. The river ran beyond the highway, wild white water roaring down the deep, steeply falling

canyon. The traffic ran busy and noisy. The river ran high in its banks, full with the mountain melt off of early spring.

Now, years later, he drives that motel in his dreams. He pulls out onto the highway and continues the trip east in the ragged old motel.

Sometimes his wife and children climb the mountain above the motel. They wave at him and continue climbing. They know he's just out for a drive, and he'll come back for them. Sometimes they stand by him in the control room or ride along in some other part of the motel, and they drive together toward some important destination.

Someday, when he has time, he will investigate the fragmented state of his memory of childhood. Many of the people he knows have a much more complete memory of their childhood. They draw energy and guidance from that memory, from the unbroken continuity of their lives.

This he remembers as part of the continuity of his adult life, not as a fragment. He was 26, living with Anna Leese. They visited Randy and his wildly extended family in the big house on the ridge. Too many people lived in the house. The toilet was plugged, but some of the people used it anyway. That whole side of the house stank like defecation.

In the evening, five adults climbed into the attic. There were no stairs. They climbed slats of wood nailed to a closet wall, through a trapdoor, crawled down a small passageway into an open, light, airy room behind the chimney, with a skylight open to the stars. They spent the night in the high, secret room.

He mentioned his dreams of passages to secret places of habitation and found he was not alone. Other people had similar dreams.

Randy said, "I never will build a stairway up here. We don't tell people about this room. I don't want most people in my dreams.

Lela and me built it like this because of our dreams. Now we come up here sometimes and dream."

They stayed in the room and shut off the lights, no opening to the world around them but the skylight open to the summer sky with all its stars and the heavens above them. In the morning, they climbed out the skylight and sat in morning sunlight, silent, for a long time.

That was a long time ago. Anna Leese went her own way.

Jason met and courted Paula. They married, and he settled into a good job. They bought a house and a bigger house. They had children, and the children grew, and his dreams became more mundane, he thought. He didn't remember most of them, so he wasn't sure.

Nothing turned out like he thought it would. The physical details of his life were much like he would have predicted, but the measure of satisfaction he had expected wasn't there.

He had thought everything would get steadily calmer and more secure. The family would knit together tighter and tighter, and their goals would be clear. They would achieve many of them. The world would become more and more comfortable.

It hadn't turned out like that. It had something to do with the way the world had changed in the last thirty years, he was sure of that. The world seemed to be deteriorating into more chaos and violence, and it seemed like Jason couldn't do anything about it. He signed petitions and donated money to groups who were trying to move in positive directions, but he couldn't see much change in those directions.

Sunday morning, he paced the house. Paula left. She had said "a church function." About ten years before, she had stopped asking him to go with her to church functions. He never said, "Yes," so why would she keep asking?

Jason the second left with his tennis racket. Jason the first didn't even know where Pauline had disappeared to.

Jason paced the house. He wondered why he felt so discontented. It had crept up on him little-by-little, until he faced deep discontentment, almost a sense of emergency. So much depended on his family, and they weren't even there to talk with. He walked up the stairs and down the stairs and through the downstairs and then up the stairs again.

When he walked into his study the second time, the controls to drive the house were there, right at his desk.

He was not dreaming. He was awake. These were unlike any controls he had ever used in his waking life, but he knew how to work them, because he remembered them from a dream.

He sat down at his desk, looked at the controls, and reached for them, then stopped before he touched them. He got up and opened the windows in front of his desk and the east window. It was a beautiful day, with the sun just clearing the mountains. Less smog hung above the city east of the house than he'd seen in a long time.

He sat back down, took a deep breath, released it slowly, and eased the house off the foundation.

It wasn't going to be like his dreams. The house didn't glide smoothly off the foundation like it did in dreams but ripped away. Wood tore, squealed as nails gave way and wood scraped across wood and then broke into shattered fragments. Concrete shattered, and the loud explosions echoed through the neighborhood.

He thought he could ease by the big spruce tree he'd always worried might fall on the house, but the house didn't respond minutely to his actions at the controls, the way buildings always did in dreams. He lurched up against the tree. He pulled back on the controls, but the house wouldn't stop as fast as he wanted it to but pushed harder against the tree.

The tree tipped slowly away. A piece of ground almost as large as the garden ripped up with the roots and took part of the driveway. That side of the house rose higher and higher as the roots levered it up. The house finally responded to his efforts at the controls, and he backed away as the tree slammed through power lines and telephone lines, crashed down and hit the ground so hard, he felt the house hesitate and shake. The root was thrown into the air. A cloud of dust moved toward him on summer's breeze. Dust poured in through the open windows.

One corner of the house dropped into the hole left by the torn up roots of the fallen tree. Jason pushed the forward control again, poured on power, and brought the house out of the hole and into the street.

He was glad Paula and the kids were out in the world that morning. He would not have wanted to miss this opportunity.

Square in the street, he slid the lever forward and picked up speed. Always in dreams, he fit wherever he wanted to go. Now, he uprooted two small elms between the sidewalk and the street and ripped down telephone wires and knocked over telephone posts. He'd have to head for wider roads. Out the bypass and onto the freeway would be good.

Something else was unlike his dreams; none of the other people driving that early Sunday morning took it as normal that a house would take to the road. People stared. People yelled. People honked their horns at him. People were afraid and got out of the way. At least they got out of the way.

He couldn't stop the house. He could slow it down, but he couldn't bring it to a complete stop. Jam and jam on the brakes, and the building wouldn't stop. It just moved ponderously forward and refused to answer his commands.

Okay. Okay. Roll then. He would figure stopping out eventually.

He didn't want to stop now anyway. He wanted to drive to wider roads, put on some speed, and see how this house cruised.

Thirty miles an hour on the bypass, then 60 on the freeway. The house handled easily, once he had room to roll and once he got up some speed. Warm wind blew through the open windows, messed up his hair, caressed his face. He liked the wind.

He wondered what Paula would do when she got home. Probably, she would call the insurance company and the police.

He would have stopped for the police cars if he could stop. He could maneuver, slow down, speed up, but he couldn't stop. He didn't know how. No matter what he did, the house kept rolling. So he racked it up to 85, 100, 120. He didn't know if the police cars were still with him. He wished he had a rearview mirror. He couldn't see anything but straight ahead and east, or east when the house had been stationary. He didn't know what it was now, left.

He had to think what to do. Maybe if he slowed way down, he could communicate and let them know he couldn't stop the house. It was beyond his control. That rankled. What if they boarded and took control and showed him how to do it?

He could communicate with them and not let them board.

As he thought, he let it slow. 75, 60, 45, 40. Police cars all around him, flashing lights messing up the sunlight. 38, 35, 34. He couldn't bring it down any slower. Voices on loudspeakers and sirens, and two helicopters overhead.

He thought, had I known how it would go, I would have designed my office bulletproof. He hopes they won't sacrifice a car, stop in front of him when he really and truly can't get it under 34 mph.

They swarm around him like flies. He can't stand their noisy, officious efforts. He'd better get out in front far enough that he can figure out what to do. He steps it to 41, then 47, 59, 73, 111.

They clear a way for him, but as he passes them, glass from the

east windows shatters into the wind. Then jagged little holes appear in the wall to his left, and bullets pop the air beside his ear.

The windows in front of him shatter into thousands of pieces. The wind of his high speed blows the glass through the room. Glass cuts him, forehead, hands, below the right eye. Nothing hurts. He isn't bleeding much, yet. He punches it and watches the needle climb, 151, 187, 209. If it was all cars, he wouldn't have a problem, but here come the choppers and the planes.

Damn, he thinks. Randy knew what he was doing. He didn't get all the way there, but he was trying. Maybe he got closer and closer, these years since.

I'm the one who designed this house. Why didn't I design a secret passage and a habitat? Why did I forget, all the critical years of my life? Why didn't I prepare for a future I see now was inevitable? Where do I go now?

All Jason can think of to do is push the control and watch the needle climb to higher numbers.