

## DREAM JOURNEY

She awoke with the taste *of* the dream. A strange, exotic sort of flavour lingering on her tongue, a blend of sweet and savoury, liquorice and nutmeg and dates and vegetables, sourness and spices. It reminded her of that awful meal in the Thai restaurant Gerald had taken her to a few months ago: strange looking dishes with equally weird flavours, quite different to anything she'd ever had before. Not that she wasn't fond of spicy food, she liked Indian curries. In moderation, of course.

Alice moved her tongue around her teeth, opening her eyes to the darkness. Light from the street lamp glowed around the edges of the thick curtains. She thought it must be ages before it was time to get up. She paused to listen to sounds of traffic outside. The volume of that was always a good indicator of the time. A bus rumbled past, then a few cars. Hardly the middle of the night then.

With a sigh of disappointment Alice turned to peer at the bedside clock. It was ten to seven. In another ten minutes the alarm would go off. She glanced at Gerald lying beside her, breathing heavily, deeply asleep.

Indulging in the soft warm comfort of the bed before she would have to get up, Alice tried to recall her dream. Already it was fading, the taste less keen. She and Gerald had been in some exotic place in China. What they had been doing there she couldn't imagine, but it had all been very odd as dreams usually are. Mostly it had been about food, but not normal Chinese food. Of course the Chinese were reputed to eat just about anything that moved, but in this dream thankfully it had been mostly about peculiar vegetables and fruits.

Hinging back the duvet, Alice decided to get up before the alarm. She hated the clamour of it and often woke before it went off. Gerald didn't, he was a sound sleeper.

Downstairs in the kitchen she put on the kettle and popped a couple slices of bread into the toaster. There was nothing more reassuring, Alice thought, than a nice cup of tea and freshly made toast. After having that odd dream she felt she needed these things more than ever, her mouth watering in anticipation.

From upstairs she heard her husband's heavy drowsy tread as he went into the bathroom. She heard the toilet flush, then the rush of the shower. Sitting at the table, Alice buttered her toast, spread marmalade, drank her first reviving gulp *of* strong tea.

From the bathroom drifted down the melodic strains of a song. Gerald was singing in the shower. Alice paused to listen intently. It sounded vaguely familiar. He didn't have the best singing voice but it was loud over the hiss of the water. She strained to hear the words, then recognised the song: 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds'.

Alice opened the window blind. The clear sky was beginning to lighten. A sliver of moon was still visible. It had been very cold during the night, leaving a pale carpet of frost on the lawn.

When the noise of the shower ceased upstairs she put the kettle on again, this time for Gerald's pot of tea. She set out milk and a bowl of All-Bran for him.

A short while later he appeared in the kitchen, freshly shaved with a crisp clean shirt and tie. He bent down to kiss her cheek. 'Morning Alice.'

Alice thought his aftershave smelled like fly spray but was too tactful to say so.

Gerald sat down to his breakfast, pouring tea into his cup and milk over his cereal. "Sleep all right, then?"

'Yes, fine.' Alice sipped her tea. 'But I had the weirdest dream. We were in China somewhere, and it was all about food.'

As she began to tell him about the dream, about the strange fruits and vegetables and the even stranger tastes, Alice felt herself drifting away. Like she was slipping back. Oh no, this can't be right, she thought. Something else is wrong too, she realised with sudden clarity. Gerald *never* sings in the shower.

Abruptly she was jolted awake by the insistent alarm of the bedside clock.