

MONA

by

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The stuff of Mona's dreams became reality. This is not to say that her dreams expressed any precognitive quality; rather, the things (and most notably, creatures) that appeared in Mona's nocturnal visions would become tangible things (and creatures) in the waking world. As such a situation is fraught with potential peril, Mona had for years now avoided dreaming if at all possible. She dreamt no more than occasionally to begin with, had developed the lucid ability to rouse herself immediately from sleep when she recognized that she was dreaming, and had been taking pills of various shape and coloration to suppress REM activity. Anyone familiar with Mona's situation would be quick to praise her efforts and accomplishments in these regards. Unfortunately, providence had not set such a person upon the earth. Neither had Mona's nighttime

activities created for her any sort of compatriot; when Mona felt vexed by the hijinks of an evening's unruly offspring, she would inevitably remark to herself how frustrating it was that her dreams never produced their most common subject, namely herself. If there were as many of her here to help her as dreams she'd seen herself appear in, she'd say, she might be able to handle the other stuff that comes with them! Naturally, if everything of which Mona dreamt were to materialize, she would be buried beneath untold duplicates of her house, her surroundings, and the few places she'd been. Instead, she would find her house altered to fit the previous evening's model, lending her quotidian existence an ongoing adjustment to a series of those "this is my house but not my house" dreams. Mona could not speak for the rest of the world, but it seemed unlikely that things beyond her immediate environs were so affected. She felt sure that somehow someone would come looking for her if, say, a WaffleHouse restaurant found itself atop an unlikely silver spire one day, or if certain adjustments were to occur to Disney's Haunted Mansion ride. Nevertheless, Mona stayed awake for four days straight after viewing "The Day After". Possibly the greatest asset for Mona in her striving for normalcy was the bland tedium of her morphean meanderings, unquestionably the result of an unexercised imagination.

Mona kept visitors from her house as best she could. She kept a PO box at the Blue Valley post office, never invited the preacher out, instead getting her gossiping done in *His* house or at the market. Those few that had been to her "farm" out among the brambles repeated visits infrequently enough to doubt their own memories. But despite the discipline and the disinclination of her character, problems arose several times a year.

When Mona dreamt the new color for the flora of the valley, the EPA responded, and they tested Mona's groundwater and questioned her about chemicals. Mona's professions of ignorance with regard to chemicals rang authentically, but the environmental engineers had nearly been nosey enough to excite the Eye-Tree. She counted herself lucky also that they looked at the well only during the day, when the singers slept. The Brown Shadow disappeared on the day they left, but Mona never knew what happened to the dream-things that wandered away from her land. She knew they could not remain as they were—she often recalled her terror (not for herself—aside from fright, she rarely seemed in small danger from her... offspring) the night of the labor riot, a clamorous affair drawing from some stark and violent memory of her father, many years past. Mona awoke to the unintelligible yells of the strikers, heard them running from gunshots and water-cannons, heard them even *after they had crested the hill*—O God, she thought, that's it, then. That's it for me. But the sound of the men faded to the distance, and Mona wondered, did they then fade from existence, away from her perception? A rush to the market the next day revealed nothing in the newspaper or from the gossip of the ladies. Mona considered going by the Lavelles' or Red Hog Farm, but her closest neighbors, for reasons they understood or not, had long taken to avoiding Mona, and she thought it best to let that sleeping dog lie. So she had come to believe that the dream-stuff dissolved to nothingness away from her immediate vicinity, or the matter of the dream-stuff was converted to the matter of our common reality (Mona had considered this a real possibility after studying the shapes of

new tree-roots and some small mounds on the embankment climbing away from the creek towards town. Some might accuse her of anthropomorphizing natural phenomena, but, given the very real impossibilities of Mona's everyday life, we can forgive her for drawing any undue corollaries of shape.). Mona's existence was a trying one, but it did have its occasional wonders to ease the endurance of the awful. There was that dewy, misty morning when cobwebs of starlight adorned the woods; and the other-worldly butterflies with their syncopated air-dances; Mona dreamt regularly of an old book store she remembered in a town she had forgot, and the delight of reading novels that she could never imagine herself, yet that no-one had ever written, was soured by their disappearance preceding completion not *too* often; and there were... lovers... whom Mona blushed to think of, even in her seclusion (including a couple of mustachioed Hollywood lotharios who had a conquest of which even *they* were unaware).

Mona wasn't sure when her dreaming began bleeding into reality; after she *was* sure that it had happened (with a small thing: a stop-motion robin, looking as though it were taken straight from the island of lost toys, twittered like a flute for three days on her kitchen windowsill—in its simplicity and harmlessness certainly not a (pardon) harbinger of things to come), doubts about absentmindedness and imagination that she'd experienced previously were seen to her now in a different light. No life event announced or enacted the change in her reality; it just started up arbitrarily at twenty-seven. Her dear Peter had left her early in their marriage, when a ditch wall was not properly secured during the

laying of a wastewater line two counties over. The insurance company had been preemptively generous in their offering, and she took it. Peter's father had left the house to them years before, so that was no bother. Mona had nightmares about Peter's death occasionally after the accident, but, because of their horrifying nature, Mona had to deal with those feelings and dispel those dreams long before the veil thinned between worlds of dream and life. She had not since dreamt of Peter.

Mona lived some twenty years in this way. Many things came and went, the most banal seeming to disappear most quickly—or did she not notice these things as acutely?—many bothers and some real frights passed through the hollow, and some dream-things, like the eye-tree, had been with her since nearly the beginning. Tending her farm or keeping livestock was difficult at the most tranquil of times, but with a little government assistance that she could no longer remember applying for, Mona managed to scrape by; in time, some of the older dream-things seemed to attempt to provide for her by killing game. Mona was wary of accepting these gifts, and the sudden appearance of the first offerings scared the living bejesus out of her such that she wouldn't leave the house for several days until she comprehended the intent behind them. So, though Mona never knew peace, she could sometimes summon appreciation for the magic surrounding her until at last she could not imagine how life could be different.

One week after her 47th birthday, Mona awoke, cursing. She'd been dreaming recently of things in the sky, and, despite living in a shallow valley, Mona knew such

things might not easily be hidden from public purview.

Three nights earlier, Mona dreamt of twirling kites, large and multi-colored. In the way of dreams, she understood them to be U.N. military kites celebrating the Olympics. Lucidly, Mona woke herself in the middle of the night and went out to see them flying overhead, full of both joy and potential menace. The dream had come early in the evening, and Mona stayed up until dawn, kept company by the songs from the well and in closer proximity by the mushroom fairies who “ooh”d and “ahh”d in their creaking way at the evening’s display. Slowly, as the night progressed, one after the other of the kites twisted and drifted away over the ridges of the valley and out of sight. Mona sighed, went inside, and half-dozed in her easy-chair.

This morning, the dream had come late, and Mona knew its results would be clear in the light of day. Luckily, the red-purple tiny tornadoes zipping overhead like lamb-sized bees were indistinct and only partially opaque, and their spastic swing-your-partners and do-si-dos kept to a lower altitude. Still, Mona was irate-- at the tornadoes, at herself; she decided to go to the market and do some shopping in the hopes that these breezy pests would quiet their din and fade to nothing by the time of her return.

At the market, Mona worried about the sound the Lincoln had made on the drive over, she forgot what she had wanted to get and ended up getting more than she wanted (and spending more than she should). She left hurriedly after being uncharacteristically short with Leslie at the check-out counter, which fouled her mood even more, as this meant

an apology or at least an awkward, unspoken rapprochement would be forthcoming—something else to worry about, to have (here, metaphorically) hanging over her head. These considerations undoubtedly distracted Mona from noticing how *wrong* the atmosphere on her farm was until she had stopped the car on the gravel drive around the side of the house and gotten out.

It was then that she remembered that she was to be annoyed at the antics of the whirlwinds or relieved by their absence—instead, she found herself befuddled by their behavior. They hovered down towards the west end of the hollow, almost... *cowering* a little higher in the sky than before, the humbuzz of their gyrations sounding only meekly above the mid-autumn rustle of the first dead leaves upon the ground. Instinctively, Mona stopped, listened, and looked across her property. For a minute or more she scanned the grounds, the trees, the sky, from her position. Then she stepped a few feet from the car, looking all around her as she moved, the sound of her feet crunching over the gravel upsetting her nerves. Yes, it was “quiet, too quiet”.

“No need for alarm, now: Most of the dream-things are night-things”, she tried to reassure herself. Also, the normal animals of the woods and fields often were absent from her property, having developed some aversion to the place. But all of them, all at once? It was odd. The play of the shadows might tell her something, but the day was overcast, and the light too diffuse to give life and definition to the shadows. Mona considered whistling for the bicycle; she knew the exuberant ring of its bell would chase away her apprehension,

but that *quality* that she sensed in the air, that oppressive and suspenseful feeling on the farm, caused her to stay silent, as though whistling for the bike would alert... her enemies? Mona chuckled softly. What could whistling do that the churning grumbles of the Lincoln had not already done? A terrible thought seized her: What if it (whatever *it* was) was inside the house? Curiously, this thought, that her sanctuary might be violated, caused her to feel suddenly exposed. If there was something in the house, there was no running from it, and it should be faced before courage withered. If there was nothing in the house, then to enter in was the wisest course of action. Hurriedly Mona opened the trunk and fetched out her groceries. She spun her head this way and that as she worked, causing her to drop the Milanos on the ground. Mona whimpered slightly, and cursed herself for being so afraid of nothing at all, then, trembling, she bent to retrieve the cookies and place them back into a bag. She straightened quickly. There was no change around her. She slammed down the trunk door, the sound of which shot out into the woods and died there with a leaden echo. Mona hurried to her door, then inside.

Mona dropped her grocery bags to the floor and wheeled around to lock the door. As she threw the deadbolt, something attracted her attention through the small window in her door. Mona let out a little shriek and her heart pounded in her chest. There, just inside the tree line, were the Pigmen.

The Pigmen were not obscured, nor overly shaded; instead they appeared almost profanely clearly in the mid-day grey. There were three of them, each completely different

from the other. The smallest was perhaps three feet tall (they all stood upright on their rear hooves), and sickly pale with blotches of yellow. Soft folds of fat settled into the spirals of a large, wide, metal corkscrew growing out from the boar's loins. Most grotesque of all were its teeth: Straight, human teeth chattered and dripped saliva from behind a snarl or smile while the boar's pin-point black eyes gleamed with malefic hunger. Despite its size, or because of its bearing, Mona instinctively understood this one to be the leader of the three. To its left stood nearly nine feet tall, an oblong mass staring dumbly, blindly at the sky, sniffing at the air while its lower lip hung down stupidly. This pig reminded Mona of nothing so much as a lava lamp with its stubby base, fat middle, and tapered top. The arms were human, but too long, hanging nearly to the ground, where great red fingers wiggled incessantly. The arms themselves had the quality of bonelessness, lacking the definition of contour of muscle and tendon pulled tight; instead they swayed or flapped languidly against the hulking brute while the fingers continued to wiggle. As blasphemous as the first two appeared, the last was simply, starkly, terrifying: Black wires of hair stood on end, insufficiently sparse to cover the beast, a curved thing, its legs straight to its waist, then the spine curving back and then forward again to end on a massive, neckless trunk-- the beast had the form of a sickle growing wider towards its point. Three-fingered claws grabbed together at a single point, like opposing thumbs at the angles of a triangle. There was neither intelligence nor idiocy about this beast, its only cunning or conscience shown through as naked savagery. Mona made these observations in a sort of detached horror,

broken abruptly when the small boar belched out a guttural laugh, as though he knew what she was doing and how she was apprehending them, and meaning deliberately to unsettle her from her observations. Mona's chest and throat felt tight as she struggled for breath. Many things had she seen in her life, on her farm, but none so ugly and *wrong* as these three. Then her horror re-doubled as she came to a realization her initial terror prevented: She had never, ever dreamt of these things.

Mona didn't know what to do. She was both terrified and bewildered. These were dream-things; obviously, they had to be. But never before had she called into creation a thing that she didn't remember dreaming the previous night. Could these be the dream-things of another dreamer? Or, could they be manifestations of some deep dream, some fear locked so far away in her mind that it wouldn't manifest even in her subconscious? Or were they evil-- the evil of her "gift" (Mona had always considered the possibility that, whatever it was that had happened to her or of what she was made up that caused her life to be as it was, was an agency or incarnation of evil) made flesh? So committed was Mona to these thoughts that, working free of them, she noticed with a jump that the Pigmen were no longer in sight.

Mona pressed her head flush against the glass of the little window, trying to use the largest angle of view available to her from that limited vantage point, looking towards the sides of the house and even down as far to the base of the door as she could. Mona shrieked in realization of the time she was wasting that she needed to better use in

securing her house. Despite living in seclusion in the country, Mona typically kept her windows and doors locked-- no surprise given the nature of her immediate, ever-present company. Still, that idea was small consolation to a woman under attack-- and Mona did feel she was under attack. Whatever these things were, their very appearance clearly represented malicious intent. Mona hurried about the downstairs, checking each window and the back and side doors to see if they were locked, stopping the shortest of moments at each to steal a glance outside to see if any pigman could be sighted. This accomplished, she went through a sort of triage list of most likely and unprotected entrances, trying to ignore the rather straightforward threat indicated by the size of the larger two pigs. Mona started by jamming a straight-backed chair under the knob of each door. She then pushed credenzas and bookshelves and upended sofas in the way of the windows. After several minutes, this flurry of exertion was concluded, and Mona stopped to listen for any strange movement around (or, God forbid, in) her house. Mona stifled a hysterical giggle when she looked about her house, at the tchochkis and books and detritus from the shelves littering her floor. Re-focusing, she listened hard, and heard only the heaving gasps of her own breath. All else was still.

A piercing cry split the silence, a sound like the squeal of a pig, yet gleeful, like, "Whee!" It came from behind the house, quickly moving closer and... up. Mona's heart sank at the dull, fleshy thud reverberating from her roof. She ran up the stairs and began to run from room to room, checking the windows. Small hooves scampered above

her, on the roof. Mona followed the sound, determined to beat them to whatever room they might be above (though the problem of going from roof to window for what she presumed to be the small, screw-cocked pig had not occurred to her). In this manner she dashed about the upstairs, sometimes skittering sideways like a crab while she listened frantically to the scratch-taps from the roof above. Suddenly, the sounds above made a quick, determined motion, moving down the center of the hall towards “The bathroom!” Mona gasped aloud. She ran the length of the house and flung open the door, looking across those short ten feet to the opposite wall as a swell of horror overtook her to see the window cracked slightly to allow the escape of steam. Mona ran at it, fairly windmilling her arms as she went, finally slamming home the window and locking it tight. Thoughtlessly, Mona turned and leaned her back against the wall and the windowframe, breathless. For more than half a minute she stayed there, shivering in that weird way as the adrenalin moves between tissues of the body. As her breathing lightened, Mona detected a sound, a small scratching. Right at her ear. Mona sprang forward and whirled around. The small pigman somehow held himself at the top of the windowframe while he gyrated profanely, dragging the tip of that metal appendage across the glass. Mona allowed herself a full-throated scream. The pigman laughed, a snarling, baying repetition of that proclamation of triumph, then dropped away from the window, out of sight.

Mona ran downstairs again, and to the kitchen (being underneath the bathroom). She pulled back the small table-shelf blocking the windows above the sink, to

try to look for the little pigman. Instead, she was greeted by a sickening fwlap! as some tendrilous mass smacked against the glass. Only when it pulled away (with a sort of sucking peel sound) could Mona identify it as the left arm of the oblong dullard pig. The dumb thing didn't turn its face to her, instead it defied the heavens with a sort of questioning blasphemous idiocy as it turned this way and that, slapping the loose flesh of its arms against the siding and the windows. Mona couldn't help but compare the motion to that of an "eraser-gnome" in the hands of an excited child, with a certain senselessness in its spinning that drove the image home. The sound of Mona's fright wheezed through her breath as she no longer strove to hide it from herself.

As Mona pushed the furniture back against the window, right before she obscured her view with the wood, she saw the third Pigman moving from right to left and curving, as though to go around to the front of the house. Mona rushed from the kitchen back to the living room. There she saw the black boar run past her view. The motion of the creature was unnatural, even for a nightmare-pig on its hind legs. The short legs covered more ground than their length of stride should allow, and Mona noticed a curious lack of rocking motion in the things gait as it sped past her view. Why these aspects should be any more unsettling than any other, Mona couldn't say, but there was that accumulation of oddness, the variety of horror that one mind shouldn't have to grasp, that pushed her concentration towards fatigue. Seeing the thing run past, Mona followed around the side of the house to catch sight of it again as it flew past, turning with dread, red eyes to glare at

her as it went, baring crooked teeth too numerous for that narrow jaw. It moved on again, as if keeping Mona guessing about where it would decide to commence its assault upon her house. After following the thing three times from room to room around her house, Mona collapsed to her knees back in the living room, and whimpered, letting out her tears in surrender to her situation. She felt lost, truly lost, and had no understanding of her crime nor the aspect of its judgment met upon her. Some few memories of happiness floated around the haze of her consciousness like little televisions blinking in and out just past her reach. Mona let it all go. There was nothing here, nothing of her for anyone to miss, least of all herself. What would it matter if--

What would it matter if she stopped in the middle of a nightmare siege and had a good little cry? Apparently, Mona noted with a small start, it wouldn't matter at all. Some several minutes she had sat there on the floor of her living room, and no fresh engagement had come upon her home from the pigmen. There was a small blink of epiphany in Mona's mind as something lined up for her, something she couldn't know but somehow understood to be true.

They couldn't come in the house. Not while she was awake. That's why they'd been working so hard to have her run around, to frighten her and run her through the ringer. They needed her to sleep. Somehow, it was related to the dream-state again. That state, so often one of creation for Mona, was now her waiting destruction. Mona knew she must not fall asleep-- if only for no other reason that she was quite sure that that

was what the pigmen wanted.

The triumvirate howl of demonic anger resounding outside her door coming at the heels of this realization served to confirm Mona's opinion.

Mona knew that she was nowhere near out of the woods, but this certainly did shift the paradigm a bit. The big question was whether they could hurt her at all, but Mona couldn't bring herself to give much weight to just walking out the door and hoping she would be all right. What could she do then, anyway? Well, she could get in her car and drive away. Maybe these dream-things were bound by the same inexplicable laws that affected all the others, and they could not exist away from the valley. Or, maybe they could. And eventually, she would have to go to sleep somewhere, and they would be upon her-- at some strange motel, or other anonymous place. Mona shuddered to think of it. That's the last option, Mona decided. The other option than flight, was, of course, fight. Mona had a valley-full of weapons, if she could somehow get them to work for her. And somehow she would, Mona decided with grim determination.

The big problem now was that she was six hours from twilight-- most of the dream-things came out at night. Six hours, then-- to plan, to stay awake (not easy, the pigmen had done their work well in tiring Mona considerably), and to try not to be too afraid of the scratches and flaps and howls and grunts invading her relative peace. Perhaps even a few spare moments to reflect upon the good and find acceptance, should that most dire of outcomes come to pass. Mona picked herself up and went into the kitchen. She

started to brew some coffee.

A yellow piece of paper with the word “well” written landscape across the page to be as large as its dimensions would allow dropped from Mona’s limp hand to rest on a stack of other similarly utilized sheets littering the floor. Mona had that undefined, light, fuzzy feeling of “brief timelessness”. Then, as soon as she dipped into unconsciousness, there was a tremendous crash! at the front door, as door, chair, and frame splintered at the force of a tremendous blow. Mona woke with a start, terrified and cursing herself. She had let herself drift off and she knew that waking wouldn’t help. It was too late for that now. Her reality had the essence of dream-- Mona knew herself to be awake, but everything around her was dream-stuff, and she could hear the pigmen, frustrated from hours of taunting and threatening, eagerly rushing into her living room. Mona jumped up from her chair at the window of her “sewing room” and another small stack of papers fell to the floor. Here, after all her planning and consideration, she had screwed up the plan before it had even begun. Of course, she had no way of knowing to begin with if she would have any support from the dream-things. She knew the eye-tree had read her messages (presumably he could read?), as the eye-tree saw everything that went on in the valley. The question of whether or not it had the ability to martial all necessary forces was another consideration entirely. Mona had guessed that the tree was a friend, as she was fairly sure, based on several embedded slivers of wood, that the tree was the first to kill

something for her-- a squirrel. Given that the tree was at the rear of the house and the squirrel set for her at her front door, Mona had to believe that another agency assisted the eye-tree in delivering the gift. The leap from thinking the eye-tree had some influence among the dream-things to believing it could organize a counter-attack against the pigmen was a big one, but to Mona, all of her hopes felt like long-shots. And now that she'd been clumsy enough to allow the pigmen entrance to her home, she half-believed that her hopes were now entirely dashed. The idea that she'd now have to *draw* her attackers outside for her plan to now work was a moot point; egress from her house was now necessary for survival.

She'd never get out through the downstairs. Though she might lose a few seconds by giving away her position, Mona hoped that following the plan might at least cause distraction enough to draw one of the pigmen out front. And so she put thumb and first finger in the corners of her mouth and let a shrill whistle ring out through the open window. She heard a flurry of movement below and she hoped it progressed as she supposed, two towards the stairs, one out the front door to respond to the tinny, rusty, eager ring of the approaching bicycle. The screw-cock and the oblong idiot appeared at the foot of the stairs. The screw-cock recognized the shotgun and jumped back around the corner with a swine curse. Mona pulled the trigger and saw the red ripple of the big pig's skin as the birdshot pocked its chest. The pig's legs seemed to instantly retract into its body, so that its rear hit the ground, enabling the things body to rock with the kick of the

shot like one of those old inflatable punching clowns. Mona turned and ran to her bedroom, shutting the door and throwing the bolt she'd moved from the side door, then jamming a chair beneath the knob. She hurled the shotgun out the window, then grabbed the sheet-rope and threw it down the side of the house. She had dearly hoped not to use this contingency-- she knew she tied the knots well enough, but she had serious doubts about her shimmying skill. Her old muscles were already tight and worn, and it was difficult to even through her leg over the sill. Guardedly she began her descent. Just as her head lowered beneath the sill, she heard two noises, almost concurrent. First, a rending of metal and what must surely have been the literal death-knell ringing from the bent bell of an old, exuberant bicycle. Second, another calamity of pig vs. wood as the bedroom door gave way. Mona tried to descend down the improvised rope hurriedly, but she was still six feet from the ground when she felt herself rising up again-- the pigs had hold of the rope. Mona knew she had no choice and let go. She cried out as she twisted her ankle as she collapsed in a heap upon the ground. She cursed herself again for the exclamation, knowing it was sure to draw the black speedster.

Mona knew the thing moved too fast for her to have any chance to retrieve the gun and get around to the side of the house. She set off running as fast as her limp would let her. She turned the corner of the house and set off away towards the great tree. As she heard the gleeful growl of the black boar coming right up behind her, she dove forward, just as the tree, knowing she would fall short, bent its boughs over her and snatched up the

sickle-shaped monster. A terrible chaos ensued above Mona's head. She closed her eyes and staggered a few steps away as stray braches rained down on her. When she was clear, she looked back in horror: the tree would not be able to hold the demon, let alone kill it. The boar's pyramidal claws whirled around with frightful ease, shredding the proud tree, loosing the viscous liquid of its thousand eyes, destroying it. Mona ran back around the house to get the shotgun. It was no longer on the ground. The screw-cock, standing in front of the idiot, had the gun cradled in its stumpy arms, leveled at Mona. Mona had no ideas and no options that she could guess.

The short pork sniggered and cocked the gun.

Suddenly, the pink tentacles of the idiot whirled around violently, clapping the screw-cock on the back of the head and knocking him to the ground. Mona screamed as the shot flew past her head. The idiot's arms kept flailing wildly with such abandon that, for a few seconds, Mona forgot that this was according to plan. The little tornadoes were doing their job. The idiot's arms wrapped and unwrapped themselves around the host's body as he staggered about in confusion. His exasperation escalated at the pain his short legs were now experiencing. The mushroom fairies were stabbing at any part of the brute they could reach, driving him purposefully back from the house.

As this was happening, Mona rushed forward and kicked the gun away from the little pig, which was using it to right himself. The pig fell forward on its bulbous stomach, cursing through those profanely human teeth. Mona suddenly felt a twisted

inspiration take hold of her and leapt to act upon it. Mona grabbed the boar by left front and right hind leg and began to turn the wretch, pushing him down as she did. The little pig protested vehemently as Mona screwed his member into the hard earth. The stench of the thing attacked her nostrils, the yellow-spotted, flaccid flesh repelled her, but Mona pushed her effort through to completion. The thing squealed and screamed and pushed at the ground as Mona, her strength draining by the moment, dragged herself over to the shotgun and retrieved it. She crawled back on her hands and knees to the screw-cock. It struggled, turning itself around, beginning to loose itself from the earth. Mona shoved the cold metal of the gun-barrel someplace wholly inappropriate. The pig's head turned around. It hissed at her with dark hate. Its black little eyes shone with venom. Mona squeezed the trigger. The little pig left its metal member stuck in the ground with a few scraps of flesh attached.

Mona raised her head from that disgusting sight to witness the second triumph, the one bearing fruit from her afternoon of planning. The tiny tornados whipped around frenetically, seeming almost to strain to the limits of their own endurance. The big idiot stumbled ever farther backwards, away from the house, leaving a trail of dead mushroom fairies, squashed from his sudden sitdowns. Finally, these bloodied dream-things reached their goal, and with one final push of wind, the blind, dumb boar tipped against the edge of the well, wavered there... and did not fall. The dream-things were spent and would fail, Mona saw, as already the ugly boar began to right itself and gain control again. Mona

screamed in anger and desperation and launched herself towards the pig. She ran those twenty paces with no limp, the last of her strength and her will chased the pain to temporary oblivion as she charged, the shell-less shotgun held parallel in front of her. The thing turned towards Mona as she approached. The tornados held no restraint on its fleshy arms, and the human hands grabbed and tore at the last of the mushroom fairies. Mona yelled and jumped and suddenly she was flying, fast, strong, true-- she smashed the shotgun across the chest of the idiot pig with tremendous force enabled her by the dissipating gasp of the tornadoes. The pig stumbled back and, this time, fell down into the well, as Mona flew over and then down onto the ground, rolling in the dirt. She heard the voices in the well begin to sing. Louder they swelled up, joyous to their allies, triumphantly deadly to their enemies. The sorrowful wail of the idiot pig did not move Mona's heart, even as it drowned in the song of the water.

Mona breathed in shallow gasps. Breathing hurt. Everything ached. She was so very tired. Then her breathing was louder. It was not her breathing, Mona realized. She rolled over on to her back. The sky had cleared. Behind the black shape looming over her, she could see the stars. The black boar was hurt, but not so badly that it couldn't kill her with ease. Apparently, it meant to deal the blow with some irony, as it held a thick branch, shattered at both ends, the dull, lifeless eyes of it staring down at Mona without wisdom. For once, the speedy thing was in no hurry. Then... Mona smiled just a little. The sky stopped being the universe and drew in to a close canopy. The stars aligned

themselves according to their constellations and thin but vibrant filaments of light stretched between them and around them, until each was defined in gossamer—a bear, a lion, a warrior, more. Then the illustrations began to move, seeming to shake loose from the fabric of the night and come down to Mona in her need. *They* were coming-- the constellations, out from their mysterious courses. Mona collapsed into unconsciousness as the black boar raised the dead branch above its head.

Mona dreamt she rode a tremendous purple tornado, only it was a dragon. She went high above the earth to a place she had never been before. Then the dragon bent low to the earth, and its breath was the purple tornado, and the tornado tore the walls from a great barn or music hall and swept clean the floor of an abattoir. She awoke the next morning next to the well, in the mess of the battle, with no sign of the pigmen except a little blood and flesh on a bent, oversized corkscrew jutting out of the ground.

For a long time Mona felt uneasy, and she worried that a second assault of nightmare-things would come. She felt undefended, as though things that had helped her (though she had only until then lived with them in begrudging peace, not friendship) were destroyed or spent in the melee with the pigmen. The worry was a full anxiety for some time, as she did not dream for several weeks following. Then she had a simple dream

about sitting and sewing in the sewing room, only the sewing room had pews and stained glass windows. And, in the morning, so it came to pass. Over time, her valley became repopulated with things, some helpful (Mona now more voluntarily interacted with some of the dream-things), some annoying, and some just a little scary. Eventually, after some few years, Mona stopped looking for the explanation behind one particularly dreadful day in a life of living dreams.